

幼馴じみ
Oryoujinji
ILL
おりょーじみ
Oryou

異世界の
迷宮都市で
治癒魔法使い
やつてます

4

モンスター文庫

I Work As A Healer In Another World's Labyrinth City

vol.4

by Osananajimi

Novel Updates

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Chapter 51: Relationships

A few days have passed since the beauty contest raid incident.

In the end, neither the saint nor anyone related to the Church of Medine has paid me a visit. I thought that maybe the saint just didn't want to talk with me in public and she'd come to visit a few days later, though.

The Area Heals at the time of that Krankheit Turtle incident were called a miracle from god by the citizens. So, in order to preserve that rumor, there might have been no way she could talk to me in that jam-packed beauty contest plaza. That thought occurred to me after the fact, but seems like it was off the mark too.

There's a possibility that she's observing me without making contact, but if someone was shadowing me then Yuel would've noticed them to begin with. I indirectly asked Yuel about it, and it seems she hasn't sensed any indications of that.

Somehow, it would appear that the "found you" really was my misunderstanding.

Which is to say, things are peaceful.

"Master, here's your towel."

"Yeah, thanks, Yuel."

I was worried about what Ruruka kissing me would do to Yuel's mental state, but she didn't particularly have a problem with it. Well, it's not like it had no effect, but she isn't sobbing over it like she did that last time when I rubbed Ruruka's breasts.

As far as the effects are concerned, lately there's been the danger of Yuel starting to sleep in such a way that her lips will touch my cheek just by rolling over in her sleep. Or the danger of suddenly noticing her staring intently at my cheek at such a close distance that it seems like I'll bump into her. Also, like just earlier, the danger of feeling her gaze more intensely than usual when we enter the bath together.

It's at most to that degree.

If Yuel were to become severely depressed or anguished, I'd be stressing out about how to deal with it, but at this level it's fine. I get the feeling her behavior has had this sort of aspect to it since the beginning, too. Well, this time, in the end all I did was get kissed by Ruruka, so it's not like I did anything myself. Perhaps for Yuel that was just barely on the safe side. She recovered surprisingly fast.

Unexpectedly, she may not be bothered that much by Ruruka.

Which is to say, things are totally peaceful.

I take the towel from Yuel, wipe my body, and put on my clothes. I'm about to leave the bathroom just like that... but,

suddenly, in the dressing room, I notice Yuel stop in the middle of changing and start craning her neck around. Plopping down on the ground, arching her back against the wall, all the while moving her neck this way and that. What the heck is she doing? Is she stretching or something?

...That reminds me.

The tavern where she occasionally works part-time as a waitress is flourishing, so it's a reasonably strenuous job. Quite possibly, she might have hurt her body somewhere while working. Knowing Yuel, there's a chance that she'd hide injuries and fatigue like that so as not to trouble me.

I can't ignore it.

"Yuel, whatcha doing?"

"Umm, a waitress at the tavern told me that breasts get bigger if you suck them, but it seems impossible for me after all... I was hoping that my body would soften up after a bath and I'd be able to suck them myself, but..."

I should have ignored it.

"And Ruruka's are big, so if mine get big too... then..."

The waitress said she could do it by herself, though."

As she's saying that, Yuel shyly lowers her head.
...So she was worried about Ruruka after all, huh.

Although, looks like it was something I should really pretend I didn't see. Saying "I can't suck them myself", Yuel makes a face like she just realized something and stares intently at me. But I can't sympathize with the intent behind that gaze.

Hold on, that Waitress-san can do it by herself? That's awesome. Just how limber is her body? No, maybe she's not flat-chested like Yuel. I bet she has huge tits... and apparently she's making them bigger by sucking on them herself. I want to be introduced to her by all means, but right now Yuel is restlessly rubbing her fingers and thighs together as if she's going to turn to me and say something at any moment. This isn't the time to think about such things.

"U-Umm. Maste-"

"C-C'mon, Yuel! Hurry and get dressed! T-That's right, I'm gonna teach you healing magic today! Apparently when you're with me your mana increases, so you might be able to use a spell or two soon!"

"If you don't mind, could you su-"

"A-Alright, I'll be waiting in our room, so get dressed and join me! Make sure you're properly wearing clothes, okay!"

I ramble on in order to drown out Yuel's voice as I escape towards our room. I'm not listening. I can't hear a single thing.

Man, what do I do?

As I feared, Yuel is seriously worried about Ruruka. At the time, Ruruka herself quickly left, so I was somehow able to calm Yuel down. But I wonder how she'll react the next time they see each other? After that beauty contest, I was kinda nervous about what I should do the next time I see Ruruka, but at the moment my emotions are a complex mixture of wanting to meet her and not wanting to.

As for what I really think, I want to meet her without Yuel or Eris finding out. In secret. Eventually, I want to raise my goodwill with both Eris and Ruruka and create a harem.

...Come to think of it, Eris as well. The way she is, lately as soon as I think she's making eye contact frequently, she makes a difficult face and immediately averts her eyes, which is to say it's happening increasingly often. She too seems to have a lot on her mind about that thing with Ruruka. I justified myself more or less, but it didn't feel very effective.

Well, with Eris' personality, she seems like she'd be considerably resistant to kissing and stuff between an unmarried couple. It wouldn't be strange for her to have such a strong sense of virtue to the level of "kissing comes after marriage". I mean, she makes a subtle face even when I'm just rubbing Yuel's head or her ears.

...I get the feeling that Eris would absolutely never accept a harem.

N-No, but, polygamous harems are apparently common among a part of the noble and wealthy classes. Although monogamy is standard for common households, and those are the values that Eris and Ruruka both hold.

But, beyond being approved institutionally, as long as I keep steadily raising my goodwill points there should still be a way to bring her into my harem. I don't have any definite prospects yet, though.

—And, as I'm contemplating the future,

the very same Eris shows up, coming from the other end of the hallway. Perhaps she's planning on taking a bath. When our eyes meet, she abruptly looks away as she continues down the hallway.

"Y-Yo, Eris. Going to take a bath?"

"...Yes."

"A-Ah... oh yeah, I think Yuel is in the dressing room, so if she's not dressed yet could you tell her to put on some clothes?"

"...Alright. I'll tell her."

When I call out to her, Eris keeps looking down as she gives curt replies. Our rhythm is always like this lately. It's undeniable, that issue lowered her opinion of me after all. I made progress with Ruruka, but I feel like I took a step back with Eris. Wait, rather than losing favor... I could still see it as her feeling down

and just getting lost in thought. But with Eris' personality, it's natural to think that I lost favor with her due to that issue.

I take a look at Eris as I'm thinking it over. A real good look at her body that's about to enter the bath.

Suddenly, Eris raises her head.

"Ah..."

And, the moment she sees my eyes, she immediately averts her gaze again. I wonder what's the matter? It looked like she was about to say something, but I also get the feeling that she just noticed that I was openly staring at her tits.

"Master, I got dressed!"

Whoa, you sure are fast, Yuel-san. Alongside her voice, Yuel herself comes racing out from the dressing room.

I'm worried about Eris, but letting Yuel speak freely right now would be exceedingly unfavorable. As much as possible, I need to lead the conversation away from the topic of breasts.

"Y-Yeah! Healing magic, right, healing magic. Leave it to me, if I'm the one teaching then you'll be able to use healing magic in no time!"

"Yes, I'll work hard so I can heal Master when you get injured!"

But I can just heal myself. Although, Yuel is brimming with motivation. Like this, she probably won't blurt out anything dangerous. Yet the second I feel relieved, Yuel suddenly glances at Eris.

"Eris-san, what's wrong?"

I take a look, and Eris hasn't moved from that spot. Even though she said she was going to take a bath, she's been watching me and Yuel in a daze.

Then when she notices me looking at her, Eris hurriedly averts her eyes,

"N-Nothing at all, Yuel-chan. Well then, I'm off to take a bath."

and she quickly enters the dressing room.

...As I thought, something's definitely a bit off with Eris.

I wonder if I should ask someone like Aria for advice? No, but if I show my face in front of Aria now, something tells me she's going to cross-examine me about Ruruka first. After that incident, between the monster corpse disposal and directing the spectators, Aria didn't have much time to talk to me.

When we meet, she'll no doubt accuse me of cheating and whatnot. Or perhaps I should say, if things don't go well with that overprotective Aria, then I can kiss my chances goodbye of ever including Eris in my harem.

Besides, maybe it's because Aria is busy with her knight brigade job, but she hasn't shown her face once at the hospital and we haven't been able to meet in the first place. Well, with a monster raid incident happening in the middle of the city, I guess there's no helping that she'd be busy.

"Master?"

Perhaps sensing a problem when I show no sign whatsoever of heading towards the room, Yuel timidly peers into my face. Well, I can't think of a good solution. Guess I'll teach Yuel healing magic for now.

"Nah, it's nothing. Alright, why don't we do some healing magic practice!"

"Yes!"

As she answers, Yuel's ears twitch up and down. I can tell the flow of her emotions just from her ear movements. She seems considerably pleased to learn healing magic. It makes me want to teach her not just to the level of Heal, but all the way up to EX Heal.

—However, those ears of hers suddenly go stiff.

And, for some reason she latches onto my clothes.

I check Yuel's expression, and it's a mixture of anxiety and loneliness.

"Shikiii, you theeere!?"

And the reason soon becomes clear. It's a familiar, cheerful voice. I can hear it coming from outside the hospital.

Coming by so late at night... it's Ruruka-san.

Chapter 52: Mark

We're in the hospital's exam room. Sitting on a chair, facing Ruruka. Obviously somewhat nervous, Ruruka keeps adjusting her posture on her chair as she observes me. Even though this is a scene I've experienced plenty of times before, just having her tell me she loves me somehow makes it look extremely different.

"A-Ahaha... I-long time no see!"

Ruruka shyly wraps her hand around the back of her neck and averts her gaze as she speaks. It's not like it's been that long since we talked. Just a few days.

"S-Sure. What's the matter, this late at night? Need treatment?"

Perhaps she's becoming conscious of it. When she misunderstood that she was dying after the beauty contest, she confessed, and on top of that she even kissed me. At the time, there was the tension that she might die from petrification, and a sense of liberation when that went away. It was an extraordinary situation. Precisely because of that, she likely got caught up in the momentum and went so far as to kiss me.

But now it's different. We've had some time, and both of us have calmed down. Facing each other in such a manner, she must be thinking about that time.

It's kinda awkward... besides, I'm becoming a little conscious of it too.

About how she had me rub her breasts using the treatment fee discount as an excuse. About how she was eager to enter the labyrinth together as adventurers. Moreover, about those magic tool earrings and how she came running right for me when I got lost in the forest.

After being told she loves me, I ended up thinking about it in relation to this and that.

Ruruka is cute. Her features are well-ordered, and I think her red hair is pretty. Her tits are big, too. I saw her in a swimsuit at the beauty contest, and even though she's big-breasted, the places you'd expect to be firm on an

adventurer are tightened up, and have a healthy eroticism to them. Plus her personality is light-hearted and she's easy to talk to.

And unlike Yuel, she's at an age where I can put my hands on her. If I tell her that I love her too right here, I wonder what will happen? Just thinking about it is making me restless.

—But, I can't do that.

Putting aside how I feel about Ruruka, at the very least, I can't do it now.

"..."

Yuel is sitting on my lap.

I don't mean she's just sitting on my lap. I'm sitting in the chair, and Yuel is sitting facing me so she can cling to me. I can see Ruruka over Yuel's head, but it's covering the lower half of my field of view.

At that point-blank range, Yuel is staring right into my eyes. I don't have the courage to say something like that to Ruruka in this situation.

"I-It's not like I'm particularly hurt or anything... I don't need treatment... D- Does that mean that unless it's for treatment, I... can't come here?"

At the same time that Ruruka blushes shyly and asks that, I feel Yuel's hands clutch my clothes. It's no good. I don't mean that it's no good for her to come to the hospital if it's not for treatment, but that I can't speak with Ruruka honestly when Yuel is this close.

I thought about having Yuel go brew some tea for me or something, but from the look on her face, that seems impossible as well. The dams of Yuel's eyes are about to burst from just that single bashful line from Ruruka. Trembling as if to implore me, those blue eyes are earnestly fixed on me alone.

...I can't burden Yuel's mental state any further.

With Yuel being so obedient, if I told her to go brew some tea she would leave, but if I do that then without a doubt Yuel will cry. I don't want to drink tea that Yuel brewed while crying; sorrowful tea with a hint of salt.

For the time being, I'll handle it by tenderly petting Yuel's head.

"Nh..."

When I do, Yuel nuzzles her head against my neck. At the same time, at a volume that I almost don't hear it, she unintentionally chokes out a tiny sob.

...Hopefully petting her head makes her feel a little relieved. As if reassuring herself of my warmth, she wraps her hands around my neck and rubs her head into it.

"A-Ahhh!? W-Wait, Shiki!?"

When Ruruka sees that she cries out, but I can't stop Yuel at this point. If she were only trying to provoke Ruruka as a woman then I would put a stop to this kind of behavior, but for Yuel that's most likely not the case.

...Yuel is just plain insecure.

Yuel isn't paying attention to Ruruka, but simply gazing into my eyes. So as to avoid missing the slightest change, simply continuing to peer earnestly into my eyes alone. In other words, what Yuel is worried about isn't Ruruka getting closer in and of itself, but a change in my heart because of that.

Like if I ended up thinking "I want to be alone with Ruruka".

Would Yuel, a slave, still have a place at my side?

Slaves are beings bought and sold with money. The moment I saw her as a hindrance, Yuel would be put up for sale in the slave market once again. Well, I would never do such a thing to Yuel, but in this world the common sense is unquestionably that slaves are that kind of existence.

Right now, the existence that Yuel depends on the most is without a doubt me. Perhaps it's natural for her to think that if I get close to Ruruka, I'll see the slave at my side as a hindrance. That she won't be able to stay by the side of the only person she can depend on.

Just how deeply disheartening would that be?

Yuel is still young. Besides, as someone with no relatives, the bond between Yuel and me is just a one-sided master and slave relationship. Considering Yuel's circumstances as well as her present mental state, it feels rather pitiful. We're in front of Ruruka, but I'll try petting Yuel's head one more time.

"Y-You're petting her again!?"

—The very instant that Ruruka protests.

At the nape of my neck, there's a lukewarm sensation. The location of that sensation was about where Yuel's mouth is.



She licked me. No mistaking it, Yuel just licked the base of my neck.

...N-No, perhaps Yuel's tears ended up hitting the base of my neck, and she was just licking those off. There shouldn't be any deeper meaning behind it.

And it doesn't seem like Ruruka has noticed, so I'll ignore it for the time being.

...Well, let's leave the matter of Yuel aside.

The fact that Ruruka didn't come here for treatment means that she came to see me. And furthermore, the fact that she specifically came this late at night...

Now I get it.

"Ruruka, I get that you want to pick up where we left off at that inn, but you should really pick a more appropriate time..."

In other words, a “night visit”. Ruruka came for a night visit. Right now she must want to do what we couldn’t do that day due to the inn being full.

But of course, that’s impossible in this situation since Yuel is here now. She would cry, and even if she didn’t cry she would probably want to join in. As a slave, it’s extremely likely that she would assist me. And for some reason she’s still continuing to lick around my neck.

"Inn? ...Ah, t-that's not it! I-I came here this late 'cause I had to sneak out of Lord-sama's place... Lord-sama was concerned because of the latest monster incident, so he said not to leave the mansion...! S-See, Fran invited me as well so I'm staying with her right now! Just earlier, I finally slipped past the watch of the knights on guard duty!"

"...What, so that's what it was?"

I see, so that’s why she came here at such a time? Sheesh, I wish she wouldn’t mislead me so much. In this situation with Yuel riding on me, letting my delusions grow out of control would be extremely awkward.

"Y-Yeah! Especially Fran, Lord-sama ordered her not to go outside under any circumstances!"

Well, that middle-aged lord does seem excessively doting. I guess that’s how he’d be when monsters run riot within the city.

...Wait, Ruruka is currently living at the lord’s mansion? I was wondering where she was staying, but to think it was the lord’s mansion of all places. Nah, she did join Fran’s party, so I guess it’s not such an odd story.

And I feel like I heard that the lord prohibited Fran from entering the labyrinth recently, so as her party member, Ruruka probably has no source of income either. Perhaps that’s why they’re taking care of her in the meantime.

"What's Lord-sama so wary of, that there could still be monsters hidden in the city like the ones from the beauty contest? Some fiendish ones like that dragon?"

"Mmm, I don’t really know. But seems like the knights are investigating, and they’re giving Lord-sama a bunch of reports all the time.

...Ah, now that you mention it, that dragon, I'm keeping it in the garden at the lord's mansion."

Is it me or did Ruruka just say something incredible?

"J-Just now, did you just say that you're keeping that dragon?"

"Yeah, I'm taking care of it. I feed it every day, y'know?"

Apparently she's raising it as a pet.

Can you keep a monster like that as a pet? It's not just a large-scale carnivore, that dragon breathes petrifying breath. I don't think that someone with normal nerves would want to get anywhere near it.

Wait a minute, didn't Ruruka almost get petrified by it? Something like that should be enough to make her hate even the dragon that she claimed to be fond of, though.

"I-It doesn't act out? Besides, your legs were even petrified by that dragon... is it really okay?"

"It's fiiine. Dragons are really smart, y'know? The fact that it attacked people was entirely that collar's fault.

...Huh? But Shiki, do you mean I was hit by that petrifying breath too after all?"

Whoops, I misspoke. I was hiding the fact that I can use EX Heal from Ruruka. Well, this girl does seem like she'd carelessly let it slip to someone like Fran and all. And I did end up telling Yuel that my healing magic was my secret with her.

"A-Ahhh... I-I wonder what happened."

But Ruruka doesn't seem to care that much either way about the petrification,

"...B-Besides, because that dragon was there, I was able to... e-ehehe."

and she starts fidgeting as she says that. Her words cut off, and she gives me a look full of meaning. When our eyes meet, Ruruka lowers her face as it reddens

slightly.

—My heart skips a beat.

Ruruka has shown me gestures of goodwill before. Though until now, I thought she was just acting in order for the price reductions to go well.

But there was a good reason behind her goodwill. It wasn't acting. It was merely a simple reaction. That in itself makes Ruruka look all the more cute.

—And yet, I mustn't forget that Yuel is here too right now.

I wonder what expression Yuel is making now? Ruruka's last line was dripping with meaning. At the previous point she was already about to cry, so it wouldn't be odd for Yuel to have broken down sobbing. I should check up on her.

However, I can't see Yuel's face very well.

But she's probably not crying. Or rather, she's most likely not listening to the conversation between me and Ruruka anymore.

...She's licking me. For some reason, Yuel is licking me around my collarbone.

Even when I stop the conversation to look at Yuel, she shows no signs of stopping her licking. I can't see her face due to the angle, but the sensation of being licked itself is constantly coming across, no doubt about it. She's licking me with her undivided attention.

...Is it *that*

? When children are anxious and they suck their thumb – has she developed that sort of mentality? That's probably it. I'm sure that's it.

"W-Well, if it's fine then that's all well and good, but..."

"E-Errr, besides, it's gotten really attached to me, y'know. Even though it never lets anyone else ride it, for some reason it lets me sit on its back! It's sooooo cute!"

Ruruka exclaims delightedly.

Oh yeah, I remember. During the raid, Ruruka tried to protect that dragon. She tried to convince the saint's group to spare it somehow when they were going to shoot it down. The saint instantly rejected her, though.

And dragons can comprehend human speech. If it still retains its memory from when it was wearing that monster-manipulating collar, it's only natural that the dragon would feel an attachment towards the sole person who voluntarily tried to protect it. If Ruruka hadn't remained in that spot to stick up for the dragon, I probably wouldn't have told Yuel to destroy the collar, at least. I would've taken Ruruka and ran away from the targeted saint at full speed.

...The saint. That's right. I remembered something else that's really important.

"Well, that's great. Oh right... that reminds me, is the saint at the lord's mansion right now?"

That saint should currently be staying at the same mansion as Ruruka. I'm worried. The "found you" was my misunderstanding, that's the conclusion that I've reached, but in the end something's still bothering me. I want to try investigating the saint indirectly through Ruruka.

"Saint-sama? Yeah. Seems like she's talking with Lord-sama every day?"

"Huh, with that middle-aged lord... I feel like she was saying something or other about donations, but do you know what they talk about?"

"...Are you interested in Saint-sama, Shiki?"

Ruruka seems to have misunderstood something; she's giving me a disapproving look, but I don't have
that

kind of interest in the saint at present. She's flat and all.

"N-No, nothing like that. Look, this monster raid stuff isn't somebody else's problem. For the sake of our own safety, I want to have you find out what kind of things that saint and the lord are discussing."

"...Hmmm, well, I guess I can. Fran and I heard a bit of their talk, so I know a little? Let's see, apparently the Saint-sama shows her face at the festival every year, only this year she had a separate goal, and that's why she was consulting with Lord-sama."

When I give her an adequate excuse, Ruruka makes a reluctant face but explains anyway.

"And, that goal is?"

"She came to search for something."

—Searching for something. Time to resurrect that “found you” lip movement theory.

Was my healing magic discovered after all? But wait, there hasn’t been any action towards me from the saint’s side for a few days now...

No, I see.

I get it. The middle-aged lord sees me quite favorably, since I saved Fran and all. If the saint was marking all the excellent healers in this city for the sake of the Krankheit Turtle incident investigation, it wouldn’t be weird if she asked around beforehand.

She’d want me, who saved the citizens with my incredible ability, to accept a suitable position within the church. But since she knew of the connection between me and the lord, she went to negotiate with him first.

However, the lord was trying to hook me up with Fran. The lord couldn’t let the church take away his heir candidate, so the negotiations were going rough. And a few days ended up passing in that manner. It may be something like that.

...No, I give up.

I don’t want to stand out very much. But if the church does end up presenting me with a suitable position, I’m sure I’d have a handful of young priestesses following me around and fussing over me all like “Kyaaa, you saved the city, my hero!”. I truly am reluctant, honest. But oh well, if I got discovered then there’s really nothing I can do about it. Developing connections with that middle-aged lord doesn’t seem too bad either; if I told him I absolutely needed an important office then, well, something tells me he’d be willing to cough one up.

"O-Ohhh. So then, what was she looking for?"

"Hmmm, that’s the thing. Apparently it’s something she didn’t really want us to hear, so... well, Fran and I were only eavesdropping from across the wall so I couldn’t hear it very well."

"...You heard what you heard, but you were eavesdropping?"

Ruruka aside, Fran does seem like the type to eavesdrop if she was excluded from such an important-sounding conversation. It's likely that she made Ruruka help her.

...Well, if that lord is involved then I shouldn't need to worry that much about it. That middle-aged lord would speak well about me to the saint, and if something were to happen I get the feeling he would accomodate me.

"...No, but."

"What's the matter, Shiki?"

...Between the lord of a regional city and the Saint-sama of the church, which one is more important?

Religions often have strong clout in politics. Furthermore, in this world the Church of Medine is the headquarters that controls the genuine miracle that is healing magic. Thinking about it that way, the title of regional lord starts to look a little overshadowed. It starts to seem distinctly like a dead-end middle-management position.

I get the feeling he told me previously that I could rely on him if I had any issues, but I wonder if that guy is actually dependable.

"Ah, now that I think about it, I do remember!"

As I'm thinking about it, Ruruka suddenly cries out.

"Errr, to purge someone? Saint-sama said something about that too. Sounds dangerous, huh..."

"P-Purge!?"

I heard a term I shouldn't be hearing.

Did she say purge just now? As in the meaning of an organization erasing an inconvenient existence, that kind of purge?

N-No, it's too early to freak out. Maybe I misheard, or maybe it wasn't 肅清 but some other 'shukusei'.
political purge

star of fate
shukusei, shukusei, 宿星. That's it, the star of fate. She's something like my fated person, so she very much wants us to get along. Maybe that's what it

means. And she did hit on me, saying my black hair was beautiful.

"Yeah, something about making the person who brought about an unfavorable situation for the church atone for their sins. That's what she was saying."

Nope. It's a purge. No doubt about it, a purge.

Wait, that shouldn't be referring to me. Something disadvantageous to the church, I've never done anythi...

I have, huh. Something huge.

That Krankheit Turtle incident. By enveloping the entire city with Area Heal, I treated every little wound and illness in the city. Although people get injured a lot since it's a labyrinth city, for a few days the people who make their living through healing magic were no doubt out of work. And the biggest organization in this city that depends on healing magic for its income is, you guessed it, the church.

...Now that I think about it, that female knight who invited me to join the Krankheit Turtle subjugation unit. I forgot her name, but I get the feeling that she was complaining about how none of the eminent members of the church would come with the subjugation unit back then.

—Something tells me there's a connection there.

The spectacle I saw before crosses my mind. The image of the saint, using shills in order to improve her healing magic ability.

...Putting on a charade.

What if, by some chance, the people of the Church of Medine brought that Krankheit Turtle to the city in order to reap the rewards from using their healing magic? What if the church orchestrated that entire incident to secure profits for themselves? If that's the case, and they went out of their way to prepare that large-scale monster to take advantage of the huge business opportunity, didn't I end up making it all go to waste?

I have a bad feeling about this. An unbelievably bad feeling.

If the church is already hostile towards me, even if that middle-aged lord

supports me, the odds that the negotiation over my rights will go well are extremely low. If making an enemy of the church isn't worth it in the first place, the lord may not support me at all.

And there are things such as slave crests in this world. With enough authority, it's a simple matter to make someone submit unconditionally. The second an authority on the scale of a nation declares you an enemy, there's no way for you to oppose them as a private citizen.

...I should run. I should run away with all my strength, right now, to some country where the Church of Medine has no influence.

She might not have discovered where I'm staying yet, but there aren't exactly that many black-haired healers in this city. Make it a black-haired healer accompanied by a dark elf girl and you can pretty much narrow it down to one. With just a little questioning of the knights and adventurers I've interacted with, she'd quickly find out that I'm here.

...That's it, I'll do a night flight.

"What's wrong, Shiki? You're really sweating."

"I-I'm fine. No problems."

This is unrelated, but Yuel is still continuing to lick around my neck. I'm sure she's wiping my sweat or something. I can't pay attention to the fact that her ears are turning slightly red for some reason, or that she's starting to breathe heavily. At the moment I have no leeway to consider any other problems.

"Err, and then, after we eavesdropped, Fran asked Lord-sama what kinds of things they were talking about, but in the end he wouldn't tell her."

...Talking with the lord. Ah, something major was escaping my mind. I may be jumping to conclusions a bit.

"Hey, just making sure, what you heard was a conversation between Saint-sama and that middle-aged lord, right? You're completely sure about that?"

"Y-Yeah. That's right...? What's the matter?"

That's right. Stay calm. What Ruruka heard was a conversation between the lord and the saint.

There's no way that the saint would be having a conversation like "when we were about to have the city be assaulted for financial gain, somebody interfered so we want to purge him" with the lord who's charged with protecting the city. If the lord and the church have financial connections then I guess it's possible, but at the very least the lord has been having everyone under his command in the knight brigade protect the city with all their power. I feel like that's a very unlikely scenario.

This is getting kinda confusing. In the first place, Ruruka said that the saint's goal was to search for something. If she was searching for a person, that "something" choice of expression doesn't feel quite right.

...It's good that I tried asking various things, but supposedly finding out the saint's purpose just leaves me with more questions. What I understand is that she's searching for something, and she's going to purge someone. I also get the feeling that it's not related to me.

Or rather, if she really was going to purge me, it would've been appropriate for her to detain me within these past few days. Leaving me alone with no surveillance, even though there's a chance that I could escape, is clearly strange.

"Ah... S-Shiki, w-well, it's getting late, so I should return soon. I-I'll be back!"

As I'm thinking it over, Ruruka hurriedly stands. While looking behind me, she exits the hospital as if she's running away. I take a look behind me to see what's up... and Eris is standing in the hallway outside the room.

Her hair is wet. It gives off a feeling like she just climbed out of the bath.

I wonder if Ruruka ran because of her habit of negotiating treatment cost discounts? By some chance, maybe she's bad at dealing with Eris since she's aware that Eris is angry over all the discount negotiations. Yuel as well, perhaps because Ruruka left, got off my lap before I noticed.

"H-Hey, you..."

And now Eris is looking at me slack-jawed for some reason.

I wonder what's wrong? Whether or not Eris feels any goodwill towards me, I get the feeling that if she thought Ruruka just came for treatment she wouldn't

be that dumbfounded.

"That mark at the base of your neck, don't tell me... after all... you've gone that far with that girl..."

As she inspects my neck, Eris' makes a shocked face and speaks. Her voice is trembling. It's conveying a feeling like she doesn't want to believe what she's seeing.

"...The base of my neck?"

I try touching it, but there doesn't especially seem to be anything there. No, there does seem to be something like saliva stuck to it, but there shouldn't be anything in particular.

No, wait, Eris was saying something about a mark. Tentatively, I check the silver mirror decorating the room, and...

—one spot at the base of my neck has turned slightly red.

This is a mark from internal bleeding caused by sucking on the skin... the so-called 'hickey'. And there's a bit of saliva stuck there. I don't even have to think whose it is.

"N-No! This isn't from Ruruka! It's from Yuel! I-It's a misunderstanding!"

I was too focused on the saint's objective, so I didn't notice at all. I take a look at Yuel, and she's hanging her head in shame. And, poking out from that silver hair, her long ears are tinged bright red.

I wasn't able to discern the saint's purpose in the end, but I did determine one thing. I thought that perhaps she wasn't bothered that much about the matter of Ruruka kissing me. It turns out Yuel-san is ridiculously worried about it.

Chapter 53: Yuel and Healing Magic

The next day.

I managed to sort out Eris' misunderstanding, and now I'm teaching Yuel healing magic. When I teach her how to handle mana, she immediately tries to invoke healing magic. And—

"It failed... even though M-Master went to great pains to teach me... i-it failed..."

feeling regret, Yuel mutters in a frail voice. She's just hanging her head and trembling, unable to show her master her face.

"D-Don't worry about it, Yuel. You didn't invoke healing magic itself, but your palms glowed a tiny bit. Just being able to do that from the beginning is plenty."

...I guess even for Yuel, succeeding on the first try is impossible. But the study of healing magic usually takes on the order of several years, so being able to produce light like that on the first try is rather amazing. She might be a prodigy. My little Yuel-chan just might be a genius.

She can fight at medium distance with knives, has fine-tuned senses, and can see at night. If she ends up being a natural talent at healing magic as well, the meaning of my existence will be under threat soon. And I already feel like even though I'm her guardian, I'm the one being protected.

If she can use healing magic, she could likely even learn to use attack magic. On top of her mana capacity continuing to rise just by being together with me, dark elves are said to be a long-lived race. She has plenty of time to study. Yuel-san's potential is frightening.

"Well, handling mana isn't all there is to healing magic. Faith and knowledge are also involved. If you practice those areas, you'll be able to use it soon."

"Faith and knowledge, is it...?"

As I comfort the disheartened Yuel, I think about it. Not about Yuel, but about yesterday. The saint's purpose, which I heard from Ruruka.

When I heard the term “purge” I immediately considered running away at night, but I got the feeling it was in no way related to me. Besides, even if I decide to run, Eris is here at this hospital too, and she wouldn’t so easily leave this place that holds so much emotional attachment for her. I can’t tell her to abandon it just because of some vague uneasy feeling.

Which is why I want to do a little more intelligence gathering regarding the saint. Deciding what to do from now on will depend on that.

...As I’m absent-mindedly considering such things, I notice Yuel looking at me. When I meet her eyes, she nervously opens her mouth.

“...Umm, Master. If you don’t mind, could you read the Bible for me? I can’t read very well...”

Oh yeah, Eris was saying that just reading the Bible seems to deepen your piety. Reading a well-defined episode dealing with god is useful for believing in the existence of god? Perhaps it’s something along those lines.

“The Bible? ...Ahh, Yuel, about how many characters can you read?”

By the way, I can read this world’s writing. I don’t know why, but I had a perfect understanding of this world’s words and characters as soon as I arrived here. Teaching Yuel should be easy enough.

I haven’t the slightest clue as to why I can read the characters or understand the words of this world in the first place, though. To begin with, the second I thought I died I was here in this world, and I don’t understand my current situation itself one bit.

...Well, no matter how much I think about it, it won’t change anything.

Perhaps there’s some reason for it, but I don’t have nearly enough material to consider. There’s no way I can reach a conclusion by continuing to rack my brain about it. It’d be more productive to try and come up with a way to look at Eris’ breasts without getting noticed.

“I learned to read to a certain degree at the orphanage. But there are many difficult words in the Bible, so I can’t understand very well...”

“I see, got it. In that case, leave it to me.”

"Thank you very much, Master! Umm, well then, please start from the middle of chapter three!"

Yuel says with delight.

Although, the Bible, huh. I haven't honestly read the Bible of the Church of Medine before. I don't know the contents in detail, either. Though I do know that in this country where the Church of Medine is the state religion, the Bible is regarded as historical fact, and in general it covers how the Church of Medine seals the evil god and its apostles.

"Let's see, chapter three... chapter three..."

As I flip through the pages in search of chapter 3, there's an illustration of some dashing cane-wielding man facing off against a great host of monsters. I wonder if the illustration is there for use in children's education? Slightly intrigued, I briefly scan the words, and it appears to be a scene of the church's saint fighting an army of monsters led by the succubus apostle of the evil god.

"Succubus, huh..."

"Master, the succubus, what happened with the succubus?"

When I quietly mutter a word that caught my interest, Yuel immediately reacts.

"N-No, nothing at all, Yuel."

...Why did she say succubus twice? Nah, maybe it just means she's eager to comprehend the contents of the Bible in order to raise her piety. Yep, having intellectual curiosity is a good thing.

But man, a succubus, huh. Succubus refers to *that* thing. The one that often shows up in dirty adult-oriented manga.

She shows you extremely pleasant dreams while you're sleeping. A girl who manipulates your desires and forces you to mate with her. She uses convenient magic to multiply human pleasure several dozen times over.

Written as 淫魔, short for 淫乱な悪魔 (lewd devil), *that* succubus, which can be seen doing plenty of that stuff in adult-oriented

manga.

...So it really exists, that succubus. No, I can't dismiss the possibility that this Bible itself is a literary fabrication by religious authorities, but seeing the term succubus makes me want to accept it as gospel.

I expected the contents of a religious book to be boring anyhow, but I'm suddenly brimming with interest. The succubus, a so-called apostle of the evil god, emerged as an enemy of mankind, but what exactly did she do?

I wonder if she made girls mate with her too? Multiplying the female knights' sexual pleasure several dozen times and putting them into an "aaahhh, I'm feeling it just from the armor rubbing me!" situation where they couldn't fight straight? My imagination is swelling.

"Yuel, I've found some very interesting descriptions in this Bible. Important descriptions, that may be applicable to advanced healing magic. I want to concentrate on reading them, so wait a bit for me."

"...? Yes, I understand, Master."

When I read a little more, the circumstances seem to be that the succubus assembled a monster army by manipulating the monsters' desires, and was attempting to attack cities. Skipping over the inconsequential fight parts, I search solely for a description of the succubus.

And there it is.

【The succubus has the ability to freely control living creatures' desires, in particular sexual desires. Using that ability, it commands low-intelligence monsters as an army.】

...No, this isn't the right area. I'm not very interested. I'll skim to the next page.

【Not limited to animals and low-intelligence monsters, the succubus can also manipulate the sexual desires of humans.】

This is it. That right there is a succubus. I'm getting excited.

"Hmm, I see."

So that Yuel won't see through the excitement within my heart, I maintain a

cool expression and play with a forelock of my hair as I read on.

Looks like this is the page where the misdeeds of the succubus as an apostle of the evil god are written.

【Posing as a human woman, it infiltrates a city. Using its ability, it stirs up the passions of all the young women within the city to their utmost limits, causing them to engage in sexual intercourse day and night and bringing the city's functions to a halt.】

It's regrettable that there's no illustration on this page. Perhaps this city described in the Bible is closer to the world of dirty adult-oriented manga than anywhere else. By all means, I'd like the succubus to come to this labyrinth city as well. I very much want to see Eris disheveled by the succubus, caught between her heightening passions and her shyness.

—Abruptly, Yuel tries to take a peek at what I'm reading, apparently interested in the contents.

"This theory, it's slightly dated but I may be able to apply it to current healing magic..."

"...!"

Saying something suitable, I stand in order to obstruct her. If I do this, Yuel won't be able to see since she's short.

As you might expect, there's no way I can let Yuel discover that I'm reading a paragraph about the succubus forcing young girls to commit lewd acts. Yuel is giving me a look of reverence for my amazing-sounding statement.

...At any rate, why isn't the succubus around anymore? Ahhh, she was sealed by the church, huh. Sealing the succubus, even the church does terrible things too. I want to bring her back by all means. Ah, but bringing back an apostle of the evil god who's an enemy of mankind wouldn't be cool, huh.

Feeling a bit of fascination for this world where an evil god exists, I go on reading.

【By continuing to manipulate the citizens' sexual desires over many years, the succubus caused a population explosion across multiple cities. As a result of

their continued fall in productivity due to following their passions and the ensuing population explosion, some of the cities were overcome by starvation and poverty.]

If you do the deed, children will be born. In this world, not to mention in the ancient era when this Bible was supposedly written, contraceptives don't exist in the first place, so I guess it's natural.

【After some time, skirmishes began to break out between humans over food and resources. These disputes drove city against city, country against country, and before long all of humanity was plunged into a great war. With mankind unable to band together in opposition, the succubus seized the opening and led an army of monsters to destroy cities one after another. With this war as the catalyst, mankind was inevitably forced to make a large-scale retreat from its territories, and one-sixth of the population at the time was wiped out by the starvation and bloodshed caused by the succubus' ability.】

...The succubus must never, ever be brought back. I guess that's an apostle of the evil god for you; her methods are way too nasty. Daring to increase the enemy's population, causing conflict over food distribution, and letting them weaken each other, huh.

I was expecting a more, y'know, succubus-like [double peaceful](#) sort of development. This is no good.

I guess that's the difference between manga and reality? No doubt about it, this succubus is the kind that comes to kill people.

...All of the excitement I've been building up instantly subsides.

"Alright, I'm good now, Yuel. From chapter three, you said?"

"Yes, from around where the succubus' characteristics are written, please."

"That was chapter three!?"

...I take a look into Yuel's eyes. She looks puzzled. Is it because my agitation came across?

But she seems okay. Her ears aren't red, nor is she fidgeting. She's making an earnest face, like she's simply eager to learn the contents of the Bible. She

doesn't seem to have an ulterior motive.

In that case she's not going to ask me stuff like "What does 'passions' mean?" or "What is sexual intercourse?" or anything.

...Earlier, Yuel was saying "there were difficult words in the Bible, so I can't understand very well", wasn't she?

If you're going to ask those things, please don't ask them to me. You should ask Eris, and let me watch her bashfully struggle to explain.

"Master, is something wrong?"

Perhaps sensing my hesitation, Yuel asks me with those pure eyes.

...Since that matter with Ruruka, there's been a side of Yuel that I can't quite figure out. She's had a precariousness to her, like she might suddenly cross a line.

Frankly, I really don't want to read aloud a story where a succubus drives young girls into wild child-making debauchery. Should I just honestly tell Yuel "parts of it are unsuitable for your age, so I can't read it to you"?

...That's hopeless. Her eyes are full of the drive to learn healing magic so she can be useful to her master. The chance that she'll respond with anything besides "I can handle it" is close to nil. Well, I'll try saying it anyway.

"Yuel, that's, well, chapter three might have a bit of a bad influence on-"

"I-I'm fine! I can handle it!"

She talked right over me. She even replied twice.

...I take a look into Yuel's eyes again. Somehow, they're telling me that she's fully determined. They're extremely serious. All I can see is an earnest desire to learn healing magic. There really doesn't seem to be any ulterior motive.

...Now that I think about it, I've lost consciousness before, back when I fell into the river.

And what's more, at the time Yuel was terribly worried about my body. Precisely because she had that experience, she must be thinking that she wants the power to heal me when I'm unable to use healing magic myself. Yuel is an

ambitious girl. Something tells me that the chances of that are high.

Do I have any other option but to resolve myself? Any other option, other than resolving myself to read aloud a succubus-driven babymaking fantasy to Yuel, a still-young slave girl? To this pure-eyed girl? This young girl who's likely to ask me "What's sexual intercourse?" five seconds after I start reading...?

There's no way I can do that.

I'll mislead Yuel as though "sorry, something came up so I can't read it" and stroll around outside to kill some time.

Ah, but that's no good. Yuel will most likely follow behind me. If she comes with me she'll find out that I don't actually have anything to do. And just leaving her behind is somehow pathetic in its own way. Or rather, since there was that monster raid incident at the beauty contest, I get the feeling that Yuel won't leave my side anyway. And she hasn't been going to the tavern lately either.

"Ahhh, Yuel, sorry but it's a little, well, now is..."

...As I'm trying to come up with an excuse for Yuel, abruptly a knocking sound rings out through the hospital. This is surely the sound of my rescue. Looks like a customer came at just the right time.

"Unfortunately, that's all for the special healing magic training today. You should come help Eris with the cooking, Yuel. I gotta go deal with the visitor!"

I can't stay in this room. I hastily pass the Bible back to Yuel and make my escape.

Alright, now who might that visitor be?

Chapter 54: Return

I want to run away.

"Hello, Onii-san."

Escaping from the room where Yuel is, I open the hospital door to find a smiling Aria.

"H-Heyyy, Aria. Been a few days, huh..."

"Yes, I've been terribly busy since then. I didn't even have the time to come see Onee-chan."

"I-Is that so. Must have been awful."

I knew she would come sooner or later. I already know why she's here.

She's here to interrogate me over the kiss from Ruruka at the beauty contest plaza. Aria was referring to Ruruka as my mistress. I can already predict what's coming next. I mean, something similar already happened before.

From now on, Aria is going to grill me for cheating and whatnot. I bet she'll respond to my excuse with "I can't leave my sister in the hands of an insincere man who admits to wanting to make a harem". It's a completely sound argument.

...But, sound though it may be, if Aria does say that, I could respond with "that's not it".

For a person like me, who when tits are dangled in front of their face with "You can rub them

" will undoubtedly do so and end up being unfaithful, there's a certain definition of sincerity to the premise of a harem. The reason I'm so fixated on a harem is because I know my own personality better than anyone.

For monogamy that's cheating, but if it's a harem from the beginning then it's not.

I don't want to make girls sad. If possible, I don't want to do anything to betray them either.

That's why, I want to raise my goodwill points with Eris and Ruruka and take the course of "a harem is fine too, so let's get married! Also, take me!". I haven't yet thought about whether I can realistically pull it off or not. From now on I'm going to explore the possibilities.

...But that kind of sophistry won't fly with Aria.

Aria very much loves Eris. It wouldn't be weird if she responded with "I can't leave my precious Onee-chan beside a man with such weak reasons in the first place. I'll introduce her to a handsome, faithful knight!", either. Quit it. At the very least don't introduce Eris to a handsome knight. Seriously, cut it out.

"...Onii-san, what's with the weird look you're giving me? ...Is there something on my face?"

I mean, a handsome knight, that's like right next to a handsome prince in terms of what women long for. You can't compare a sexually-harassing healer who drags around a young slave girl to a handsome, honest knight. You absolutely mustn't.

...Wait, huh? Hold on a minute.

"Aria... did you just call me Onii-san?"

"Yes. Because Onii-san is Onii-san. Or would you prefer Onii-chan?"

"N-No, that's not what I meant."

Assuming Aria hasn't just awoken to a brother fetish, this sudden Onii-san moniker no doubt means brother-in-law. In other words, calling me that means that Aria still wants me and Eris to get together.

...Does that mean she's not here to grill me? That she's not here to pull Eris and me apart?

When I look at Aria questioningly, she peers into the hospital and inquires.

"That reminds me, is Onee-chan here now?"

"Y-Yeah, she's making lunch inside."

"I see."

Asking only that, Aria returns her attention to me. After that, she takes a deep breath, and shows me a deep sigh. Then, with a reluctant feeling, she opens her mouth.

"While Onee-chan isn't nearby, I have something to tell you, something important.

...Seeing how Onee-chan reacted at that beauty contest convinced me. Onee-chan loves you, Shiki-san. No doubt about it."

"...Seriously?"

What the heck is she saying out of the blue?

But wait, this is a valuable opinion.

...As for me, I don't really understand what Eris thinks of me.

She threw me out of the hospital at one point. And Eris has a remarkably dutiful personality, so I couldn't let go of the possibility that the fact that we're living together now is just "you bought the hospital back for me so it can't be helped", either.

On one hand she could think of me as "the special, lovely man I'm sharing a home with", but perhaps it's "the sexual harasser I'm allowing to live with me out of obligation". There's still the possibility of "the lolicon who buys slave girls" too.

"It's true. I know Onee-chan better than anyone, I guarantee it as her younger sister."

And yet, according to Aria, she apparently loves me. Though I myself don't think that she could hate me all that much at this point. But as for whether Eris holds romantic feelings towards me, that's rather doubtful. I mean, she hates it when I sexually harass her.

"But you know, Aria, I was thrown out by Eris at one point, so isn't that not the case after all?"

"Just earlier, I properly asked Onee-chan about how she threw Shiki-san out and the debt and all."

So you asked? You ended up asking, huh? You ended up asking about the story of me getting kicked out for sexual harassment, did you?

Let's take a step back and look at the scene. Police cadet Aria heard the testimony from the sexual harassment victim Eris, and I, the criminal, am right in front of her. Since Aria is only talking about her family it doesn't necessarily mean that's her intention, but this scene's composition alone is the worst. I'm just waiting for the handcuffs to come out.

But, unaware of my innermost thoughts,

"I think that the fact that Onee-chan threw you out was mainly because she didn't want you to know about the debt. Apparently it was almost as much as the cost of the hospital itself, and she didn't want to burden you with her troubles and anxieties. So it's not like she hated you or anything, Shiki-san, I'm sure that's not it."



she says that while slightly averting her gaze. She must feel bad about that

debt. I mean, her knight academy tuition is what started it. And she went back to just calling me Shiki-san before I realized it.

Although I get it. Certainly, that does seem likely. I thought it might be the case too... but even if that was part of it, the number one reason was probably different.

"But y'know, didn't she say it was because I pissed her off the day before she threw me out? I really think

that was the reason, though."

"*That?* What do you mean by *that*?"

"You heard about it already, didn't you? About me sexually harassing her."

"Se!? S-Se-Sexually harassiiing!? Shiki-san, w-what the hell were you doing to Onee-chaaan!?"

Apparently Aria wasn't expecting my reply? Her voice becomes hysterical.

H-Huh? She didn't hear about it? But just now she mentioned that she asked...

...No, maybe the one thing she didn't hear about was the sexual harassment. So Eris left that part out, huh... I just assumed she already knew about it.

Well, once she calmed down, I guess there's no way she would tell her younger sister about something like that. All the more so since it's Eris we're talking about here.

When I try to contain her agitation with "P-Please wait a minute", she looks down and starts grumbling something. This is dangerous. I really saw the arrest course open up there. I should say something. I should say something to dodge the issue.

"W-Well, let's leave that aside! The fact that Eris got mad at my sexual harassment means that she has no romantic feelings for me, doesn't it?"

And, when I move on by saying that,

—Aria's head whips back up.

She knits her brow like "what are you talking about?" and looks deep into my

eyes. Her face is saying "Huhhh?". No, maybe more like "HUHHHHHH!?".

"...Umm, Shiki-san... I can't imagine this is it, but... don't tell me you think that for lovers, it's fine to do perverted stuff anytime and anywhere? There's no way that's what you're thinking, right?"

To the degree that you wouldn't think that she was calling me Onii-san just a minute ago, Aria draws back in disgust. The look in her eyes is just about saying "this is why you're still a virgin". It's saying that I'm an unbelievable idiot. These eyes are dangerous.

...I'm a guy who can read the mood. I know what to do at times like these.

"Y-You moron, h-how could I possibly think that!? T-That was just a j-joke! Don't take it seriously!"

For now, let's deceive her.

But... it was no good after all? Do girls get mad about sexual harassment even from the one they love? Does that mean it's not okay to rub your lover's breasts whenever you want? Today I learned.

"...W-Well, if Onee-chan still loves you even after that, I'll support her, but... I'll s-support... her, but..."

Aria makes a complex face and holds her head. She seems a bit conflicted. Apparently my previous statement was unwise after all. In Aria's head, my stock probably just took a nosedive.

"Nnnnh... oh right, I don't have much time. Let's get back on track."

However, Aria instantly shakes her head and looks at me. She sure switches gears quickly.

"Onee-chan loves you, Shiki-san. There's not a shred of doubt in my mind. She may have thrown you out due to sexual harassment, but that's most likely because you didn't make the proper arrangements."

"Arrangements?"

"Because Onee-chan thinks that even kissing should come after marriage.

...When you were thrown out, I bet you did something like pushing her down without a word of romance, right?"

"I-I might have done something close to that..."

I got too excited from peeping at Eris fully nude in the bath and accidentally pushed her down and rubbed her breasts. I was only intending to peep at first, but Eris' figure was too sexy and I lost my sense of reason. I apologized afterwards when I returned to my senses, but yeah,

that

would be going too far even now. I'm carefully reflecting on my actions. So please just don't arrest me.

"See, I knew it! Of course that would make her angry! If you sincerely propose, get married, and then tell her you want to have children, Onee-chan would gladly accept it. Onee-chan loves kids, after all."

I wonder what would happen if, right now, I told her that since Eris and Ruruka both love me, I want to make a harem.

...I absolutely can't say it.

...Or rather, I wish you wouldn't so naturally encourage babymaking with your older sister. No, I don't mind the encouragement at all, but if you tempt me that much, I might really go for it if the opportunity presents itself. If I screw up to that extent, there won't be any recovering from it. I'll probably be thrown out of the hospital. I somehow got things back to normal the first time, but there most likely won't be a next time.

"Well in any case, I want to support my late-blooming Onee-chan to fulfill her love, that's what it comes down to."

"So that's the reason for "Onii-san", huh."

"Yes. It's important to build up these small affirmations too, after all. But actually calling you that feels a little uncomfortable, so I'll ooooonly do it once in a while."

If it's an established fact in Aria's mind, then what happened to the

established fact that Ruruka kissed me? I'm pretty sure she was watching that too.

No, for Aria, maybe the fact that Ruruka kissed me wasn't as important as the fact that Eris saw it and what her reaction might be. Of course there's still the feeling that I'm a cheater and whatnot, but Aria's motivating principle is how *Eris* feels about it.

"...And we ended up having a long conversation, but this wasn't a good time for it. Shiki-san, well, could you hurry and call Onee-chan over for me?"

"She's inside, so why don't you come in?"

"No, I really don't have time... that's, it's sudden, but I'm going to accompany Saint-sama's return to the royal capital as an escort. And she's leaving immediately. That's why I came here today, to say goodbye to Onee-chan."

What did she just say? Did she just say that the saint is returning to the royal capital? And moreover, immediately?

"R-Returning to the royal capital?"

Ruruka was saying that the saint had a purpose for coming to this city. But in the end, she never contacted me. And now she's returning to the royal capital immediately.

...In other words, that means the saint's purpose had nothing to do with me after all.

"Yes. The beauty contest... if there were to be another attack of the same size, her safety wouldn't be guaranteed. I heard that Saint-sama judged that staying any longer would be dangerous."

Now that she mentions it, that saint didn't have very many guards escorting her. I wanna say there were like three or four of them at the beauty contest. Although they could use magic, and they were probably elites. But if Yuel hadn't been there, and the dragon had continued to rampage like that, it would've caused some serious damage. If another attack happened, we'd be woefully unprepared for it.

"But that's so sudden."

"I still want to stay in this city, but... about two days ago, Lord-sama sent out a large-scale investigation unit for the Krankheit Turtle incident. Looks like they really don't have enough personnel to guard an important person. I was personally nominated to escort Saint-sama, so I can't refuse."

Aria says, poutily.

Seems like the knights are seriously shorthanded. Well, I've seen them fighting so many times now, and they were incomparably stronger than Eight or Geyser. Maintaining that level of quality may necessarily result in their numbers being low.

"Got it, I'll go call Eris. Wait a sec."

...So the saint is leaving this city.

I feel like I just coughed up a bone that was stuck in my throat. The clouds that have constantly been hanging over my head are finally clearing up. There's a part of me that still wants to ask Aria about Eris, but since she has work it can't be helped.

I return to the interior of the hospital to fetch Eris.

"Sorry, but could you watch the fire for me? Please make sure the stew doesn't burn."

As requested by Eris, I switch places with her and stand at the kitchen counter, watching the pot. While she's talking to Aria, it seems I'll have to do the cooking.

"Man... this is inconvenient."

I continue to feed a trickle of mana into the magic stove, an ignition magic tool, to regulate the intensity of the flames. It'd be great if it was like a gas stove where you click once and the flame continues to burn, but this shoddy thing needs you to continuously feed it mana while you're using it.

And what's more, the heating power is proportional to how much mana you pour in. This is simply a finicky, tiresome knockoff. And if you put in too much, just like shorting out an electrical device, it breaks and starts to smoke. I've

broken one before, when I first came to this world.

Frankly, this type of magic tool doesn't suit a guy with a massive mana pool like me. Yuel is here too, but since she just practiced healing magic, she doesn't have much mana left. I can't leave it to her, either.

...I hope their conversation doesn't drag on too long.

I've skillfully managed not to break it yet, but since my mana manipulation isn't that great, the flame won't stay stable. If I lose focus, the stew will burn.

"Master, is there anything I can do to help?"

And while I'm thinking that as I watch the pot, Yuel comes asking. Looks like she's bored with having nothing to do.

"Nothing in particular. Just do whatever you want."

"Whatever I want?"

Yuel replies in puzzlement. Well, since her master is cooking, maybe she's thinking that it's not okay for a slave like her to be relaxing. But there doesn't seem to be anything left for her to help with anymore. Yuel's restlessly looking around for something to help with, but sorry, I'm gonna have you sit tight.

—But Yuel's expression suddenly brightens, as if she's thought of something.

Then, Yuel slowly takes out the Bible.

...Yuel-san doesn't miss the slightest chance to study, how commendable.

She starts reading the Bible just like that. Can she read it by herself? I observe her out of the corner of my eye.

Yuel seems interested in the illustrations; she's started to gaze at one dazedly. That's the same one I was looking at. The illustration of the succubus and the saint in chapter three.

After a nice long look at that illustration, Yuel's eyes slowly pass over the writing. However, her expression gradually grows cloudy. I guess there are words she doesn't understand after all.

Then, before a minute has elapsed, Yuel's eyes completely stop moving.

She raises her head from the Bible. At that instant, I return my eyes from Yuel

back to the pot.

"..."

Making sure not to glance in her direction, I try to sense what she's up to.

...I can feel her gaze. No doubt about it, Yuel is watching me. Most likely she's pleading for help with those puppy-dog eyes. I can't possibly ignore her if our eyes meet, and something tells me those eyes are going to ask me for a detailed explanation of the story of how the succubus drove mankind to depravity.

I stir the contents of the pot as I manage the fire. Praying for the conversation between Eris and Aria to end soon, I glue my attention to the pot.

Chapter 55: Dream

When I open my eyes, Eris is straddling me. The morning sun hasn't come up yet, and the room is still dark. I'm face-up in bed, and Eris is perched just above my waist.

I close my eyes for a moment.

...Calm down. Eris isn't the type to do something like this. It's probably Yuel and I'm just seeing things. It's just my desire showing me a hallucination.

I try opening my eyes again.

Eris is straddling me.



"E-Eris!? W-W-W-W-What are you doing!?"

What's with this situation? How did it end up like this? Is this a 'night visit'? Could it actually be a night visit? Did
that

Eris, unable to resist my defenseless form sleeping beside her, embark on a night visit?

"...! I-I'm so sorry..."

Realizing that I'm awake, Eris awkwardly lowers her gaze. But at this angle I can still see her face quite well. It looks like she's simply bashfully trying to endure. What's the meaning of this? I wonder what the hell has gotten into her.

"W-What's the matter, Eris? D-Did you eat something bad or what? Y'know, like Orc testicles, or softshell turtle..."

When I ask, Eris just knits her eyebrows in further embarrassment and shuts her slightly open lips. I wonder if she had some reason to climb over me? No, but she shows no signs whatsoever of getting off of me. Seriously, what the hell is going on?

"Ah..."

As I'm watching Eris and speculating, her eyes meet mine again. Did that embarrass her? She averts her gaze once more.

"O-Oi... Eris?"

However, right after I call out to her, she looks back at me with resolution in her eyes. And, just like that... lays her body down onto mine.

"E-Eris!? S-Seriously, what's the matter with you!?"

Eris' face is now level with mine. Her slender blonde hair is swaying softly. And above all, those breasts. Eris' huge breasts are squashed between us, and things are getting very, very intense. This is dangerous. This is dangerous, really dangerous.

"I'm afraid I lied to you. I told you that I'm sleeping in the same room because I was worried about you and Yuel making a mistake, but the truth is... that wasn't it."

I hear Eris' heated breath right next to my ear. The moonlight pouring in through the window illuminates her. Through her hair, her ears and her lovely nape are flushed red with arousal.

"It's because I love you, and I always wanted us to be like this. But I didn't want you to think I was an indecent girl..."

Was she good to go? Was she okay with it at any point? I've been ready and willing for the longest time, though.

"I feel strange. My body keeps getting hotter and hotter, and I can't stand it anymore."

Suddenly, a line of sweat trickles down the nape of Eris' neck.

Her body is... hot...? Eris is clearly not herself right now. It's as if she drank an aphrodisiac or someth...

...Wait. That's it, the succubus.

Most likely, the succubus came back while I was asleep. And then Eris grew unable to bear her stirred-up desires any longer, and initiated a night visit with me, the man who had previously caught her interest. In that case, there's no helping it.

Having her tell me she loves me and initiate a night visit, refusing to put my hands on her is not something a man would do. Besides, this is medical treatment. In order to return Eris to normal after the flames of her sexual desire have been fanned by the succubus, I need to temporarily release that desire for her. There's no avoiding it. Finally, this day has come.

Then, I slip out from beneath Eris and strip off her clothes–

...And that's what happened in the incredibly erotic dream I was having.

This time, as far as I can tell, I'm actually awake now for sure.

That was a dream just now. It wasn't reality. It was merely an illusion, brought on by my desire.

The only one riding on top of me is Yuel, clinging to me in her sleep.

...Because it's right after I was having a dirty dream, this is a hazardous situation. In terms of a male physiological phenomenon. I should move Yuel over a little. It's a good thing she's asleep.

...Man, I bet I had this dream because I read that book with the succubus doing all that stuff. It's that Booble's fault [1]. There was the talk I had with Aria about Eris, too. The details left a deep impression on me, so it all ended up coming out in my dreams.

"...But maaan, I was this close..."

Just a little further and, even though it was in a dream, Eris and I would have crossed the line. Well, I've heard somewhere before that the way dreams work is that you usually wake up when you get excited, so dreams like that often stop just short. Unfortunately.

Although, after seeing a dream like that, the feeling of wanting to actually revive the supposedly sealed succubus wells up in me...

I mean, we're presently living under one roof, not to mention staying in the same room. If the succubus does return and Eris becomes unable to hold back her desires, my earlier dream could possibly become reality. Perhaps I could do erotic stuff like that with Eris every night. I wonder if there isn't anyone else like an apostle of the evil god who might really revive her?

Well, it was also written that after a while the succubus caused a population explosion and war broke out, so I guess it's hopeless after all. Besides, I'm pretty sure the Bible said that she was sealed, but I have no idea how she would be brought back.

If the Bible's contents are fact, the church shouldn't want an apostle of the evil god to ever be resurrected. I doubt that anyone but the top-class members of the church knows about the sealing method. It's impossible for her to come back in the first place.

Enough already. The term succubus makes my delusions swell, but there's no point fantasizing about an impossibility. I'm gonna stop thinking about it.

Right now it's essential that I raise Eris' affection towards me somehow, and open the path towards the harem route. Alright, what'll I do today?

"...You're going to help out at an orphanage?"

As I'm observing Eris and looking for an opportunity to earn some points with her, she abruptly mentions that she's heading out.

"Yes, it's an orphanage in the neighborhood... I might not have told you."

It's just before noon, the perfect time for lunch.

It's right after yesterday.

...Yesterday, my stock with Aria fell drastically. She spoke with Eris immediately afterwards, so she might have realized that Eris doesn't really love me after all and gone off to introduce her to one of the city's handsome knights. "You might have a chance to meet him if you visit his location indirectly during lunchtime... on your way to the neighborhood orphanage, or so I've heard."

"...Oh yeah, I heard you love kids."

I'm pretty sure Aria told me that yesterday.

"...! T-That's not the only reason. That hospital, its management situation isn't going well... the director is someone who looked after me when my parents died, so I've been helping them out occasionally in any way I can, ever since."

Eris blushes slightly and tries to change the subject. I don't think that liking children is particularly something to be embarrassed about, though. And I'm sure she doesn't mean that in a weird way.

...Although, the orphanage is having financial difficulties, huh?

"Now that you mention it..."

I take a sideways glance at Yuel, who's just finished brewing me some tea.

"...Yes, the orphanage I was at also went bankrupt from money issues."

Yuel told me that she became a slave because her orphanage went broke, and she was sold to cover its debt. Chronologically, it must've happened a little before she became a slave, but that's still relatively recent.

"I guess management is tough everywhere."

Well, compared to modern Japan where I came from, it's not like this world's social system is that well-developed. Even if the budget is tight, just having a

proper orphanage must be better than not having one at all.

However, Eris' expression becomes a little grim, and her voice tightens slightly in anger.

"...No, it's probably not so harsh elsewhere. The issue is just that... all of the city orphanages in this region are under the jurisdiction of this city's Archbishop-sama.

Archbishop? Now that I think about it, I saw him at the beauty contest plaza. He was a chubby little pig-man. I wonder if there's a problem with that archbishop?

"So the church runs the orphanages, huh... if things are that tight, why doesn't that middle-aged lord shell out some money?"

"It's not exactly that the church operates every single orphanage itself. The church just receives an endowment from Lord-sama in exchange for the charity work he entrusts to it, and it spreads that out in turn to the privately-run orphanages. The church in this city is probably skimming a considerable amount of money off the top."

"...What's with that?"

What's with that subcontractor arrangement? I feel like there's no need for the church to be involved. Moreover, like Eris said, there's a good chance that it's keeping a share for itself.

"But, austere though it may be, I've heard that it isn't to the point of being unmanageable. Because of that, it seems our Lord-sama can't do much to interfere with the way the church operates."

"...Can't the lord just reduce his contribution to the church and give money to the orphanage directly?"

"There are certain kinds of concessions included in these things, too... so it's impossible to interfere too much."

Concessions? So the church carries out charitable work using donations from the lord, and it's already factored in that they'll pocket some of it? Well, the Church of Medine is this country's state religion and all, so the lord may have

his own unavoidable reasons too.

Or perhaps I should say, one of those reasons already comes to mind.

"...Hey, Eris, how many people do you know outside of me who can use EX Heal?"

"Eh...? Err, I suppose I've only seen you, Saint-sama, and this city's Archbishop-sama. Other than that, I've heard that some of the other archbishops can use it, but... what about it?"

"Nah, just curious."

I knew it. So far, I've only seen two people who can use EX Heal. And both of them were members of the church. Eris too doesn't appear to know any EX Heal users outside of the archbishop and saint from the church.

...Healing magic is typically something you acquire by studying at a church. That means the church can capture any rising talents at an early stage.

—Due to that, the church has a monopoly on EX Heal.

That may be the reason that such lucrative concessions exist for the church.

Sickness and injury strike unexpectedly. What's more, if it's a wound or illness at the level where EX Heal is necessary, you might not have enough time to call in someone talented enough to use EX Heal from elsewhere. For that reason, it's necessary to maintain favorable relations with the influential church, even to the point of creating these artificial concessions. That may be the way of things. Well, that's just my guess though.

"Man, Eris, the number of people who can use EX Heal must be really limited. To think that even you don't know of that many when you trained at a church."

"That's right. I've heard that to use EX Heal, you need as much mana as ten or so healers who can use High Heal combined. Rather, you're the strange one for being able to use it numerous times."

Just being able to use High Heal makes someone plenty elite, so yeah, doing the share of a dozen of those elites certainly sounds demanding. Now I understand why there are so few of them.

As I'm digesting the information, Eris furrows her eyebrows as if she's having

some doubts. After that, she opens her mouth.

"Now that I think about it, you even used Area Heal on the entire city. And you can use EX Heal... that's, you must have been through some incredible circumstances up until now to have that much ability, but I never thought to ask..."

With her hand on her chin in a thinking pose, Eris comments to me. I wonder if she wants to ask now? She's looking at me with inquisitive eyes.

..But I do have some incredible circumstances, so I hope she doesn't ask. I don't know if she'll even believe me if I tell her my mana capacity is enormous because I came from another world.

And, as I'm considering it, Yuel enters the conversation.

"Master, I want to learn to use amazing healing magic like yours. I want to increase my mana. So, well..."

Oh my, is she requesting for me to commentate the Bible again? But the succubus passages are off-limits. I pet her head to distract her.

—When I do, Yuel contentedly nuzzles her head against me.

...Ah, this is something else. She was just asking "Can we cuddle?" indirectly. Since being next to me increases her mana and all.

Yuel wraps both hands around my waist, and starts sticking to me like she's trying to nestle her face into me. She narrows her eyes in total delight.

"A-Ahem..."

Seeing that, Eris clears her throat as she looks at me with a dissatisfied expression. I'm worried about those looks too.

"...This conversation has dragged on a bit too long. I need to leave soon or I won't make it in time to prepare lunch for the orphanage. I'll be back later, alright?"

And, saying that, Eris tries to leave the hospital.

Seems like her doubts from earlier have cleared up. Or rather, she might possibly have guessed that I don't want to talk about it from my expression. She

hasn't pried too deeply into my origins up until now, either.

...Although, helping out at the orphanage, huh?

That's it.

"Can I come too?"

I have no interest in the orphanage, but if Eris is going to help out there then so will I. I'll appeal to her by showing her my dependable side. Having more workers shouldn't be a bother, and Eris will likely be glad too.

...However, Eris looks at me with a conflicted face. No, at me and Yuel. Her attention is on Yuel hugging my waist, continuing to nestle her face into it.

"I feel a little uneasy taking you to the orphanage, though..."

Furrowing her brows, Eris' face shows genuine concern as she says that.

Footnotes:

1. More untranslatable wordplay: 聖書 (holy book) → 性書 (sex book).

Chapter 56: Orphanage

Sophia Orphanage. It's located not that far away from the hospital.

From the outside, it appears to be an ordinary standalone house that's been deteriorating. The number of orphans being raised there are: 1 baby, and 8 children anywhere from age 5-12. It's a very small-scale orphanage, being run by a single kindly granny named Sophia.

We arrived at this orphanage about 10 minutes ago. Eris and I greeted the director Sophia-san together, then immediately got to work helping out.

Well, I say helping out, but what I'm doing is simple. Sophia is going to meet someone after lunch, so she just wants me to look after the kids during that time. Although since Eris is supposed to help prepare lunch, it looks like we got here a little on the early side.

And now, with the baby over her shoulder, Eris is assisting Sophia with making lunch for the children.

"Onii-chan, awesome! Super awesooome!"

"One more time, do it again!"

"Heyyy, how do you do that? How does it work? Teach me, Onii-chan!"

"P-Please teach us! I want to try it too, Master!"

In the meantime, so that these mischievous kids don't do anything weird, I'm keeping them in the cafeteria. I'm basking in envious and reverent looks from all the children. What exactly am I doing, you ask? — it's origami.

"How's that? This one is a bird known as a crane."

"Awesoooome!"

"One more time! One more time!"

"Heyy, how did you fold it? D-Do you start off with a triangle fold?"

"Master, amazing, you're amazing!"

Having animals steadily come into form as I fold the paper must be a novel

experience for the children; they're staring at my hands and eating it up. Apparently, the culture of playing with origami doesn't exist in this country.

By the way, if you're wondering why I'm so good with origami, it's because that was my topic of choice during free study in elementary school. You couldn't even really call it study, it was pretty much just copying an origami textbook page by page, but I generally remember the contents of that textbook even today.

There are patterns in origami. To a certain extent, if it's something simple then I can even improvise the folds for it. Classics like the crane are a no-brainer, and with animal faces there's plenty of room to ad lib. I never expected that experience to come in handy this later on.

Frankly, when Eris told me "While I'm cooking, watch over the children and make sure they don't do anything dangerous" I was at a loss for what to do, but when I tried this it unexpectedly worked out.

And, after my origami performance captures their interest,

"Alright, I'll give you some paper, so try making whatever you want."

"I-I'm gonna make a Goblin!"

"I wanna do a Slime."

"Hey, how do you make a bunny? Hey, tell me?"

"I want to try making Master with origami."

If I give them paper, all I need to do is keep an eye on them. Having them running around roughhousing would've been a hassle, but giving them a new toy like this keeps them under control.

The children obediently focus on folding paper. All that's left is for me to occasionally give advice and show them a new origami sample at appropriate times, and that should keep them busy until Eris finishes helping with the cooking.

Well, when I'm involved, childcare is a breeze. With this, maybe Eris will feel my paternal side and think "if it's him, raising children together might be nice..."

—As I'm having those thoughts, I notice Yuel, who had mixed in with the

children, stop moving her hands all of a sudden.

...Now that I think about it, Yuel-san. She blended in on the orphan side before I noticed, but it was too natural so I didn't say anything.

I wonder if she wasn't able to fold a miniature Master very well, and she wants to ask me for advice? But that's impossible even for me. It's not like my folds are at a high enough quality to distinguish an individual person. I wish she'd stick somewhere in the neighborhood of the cute animal face series, at most.

...However, although Yuel stopped moving her hands, she isn't looking at me.

Yuel's gaze is fixed upon a young girl who appears to be somewhere around 7 years old.

...I wonder what's up with this kid? While the other children are going nuts for origami, Yuel is just staring at that girl.

...Looking at that girl, I notice something. She's not holding any paper. She's not even looking at it. Rather, it doesn't seem like she's showing any interest in origami at all.

She appears to be holding something in her hands, though, since she's making a stroking motion. But it feels like her mind is elsewhere. It's as if she's just waiting for time to pass, just sitting and staring off into nothing.

"What's the matter? Is origami boring?"

"Nh..."

For some reason or other, I try calling out to her out of concern, but her eyes tear up and she hangs her head.

...I wonder if she's shy? Well, when a stranger suddenly shows up, I guess some children will react this way too.

"Well, there's plenty of paper. You can try it later if you feel like it."

For the time being, I call out to her again, and–

"Gh...uu... uuuwah...."

the girl buries her head in her knees and starts to cry.

"Oi, d-don't cry! I-I'm not doing anything, okay?"

W-What should I do? I never expected her to cry just from being talked to. Yeah, I guess I still don't know how to deal with these kinds of kids. And maybe she's simply afraid of adult men. Right, shall I go call Eris and have her handle it instead?

—Then when I go to call Eris, Yuel (who saw the girl's reaction) looks over at me for some reason.

What's with that, those look like eyes of anticipation.

...What could she be expecting? For me to handsomely put a stop to the girl's tears now, or something?

...No, I get the feeling that's not it.

It's just that I can't quite tell what Yuel is thinking. When I tilt my head,

"Master, this girl may not be able to see."

Yuel offers a suggestion. The girl's shoulders quiver.

"...Really?"

It didn't seem that way to me, though.

...Wait, Yuel had a period of blindness, so maybe she would understand.

The girl raises her head slightly, and looks in Yuel's direction. Her face is curious, like "How did you know?".

...I take a closer look, and something does seems slightly off about her vision or focus or whatever you want to call it.

...I get it. She can't see, so she can't do something like origami. Is that what it means?

"...Um, not exactly, I can see a little. But... I can't see any small details since everything's blurry..."

The girl speaks to Yuel in a trembling voice.

...So blurry that she can't even see as far as her hands. I've heard of something like that. Most likely, this kid has extreme amblyopia. It may be that she can vaguely tell the state of her surroundings, but can't focus on minute details or anything, and everything looks hazy, that kind of feeling.

"Her eyes, huh... eyes are..."

...Having a seeing disability must be terrible.

EX Heal is necessary in order to treat eyes. And since they can't be treated without EX Heal, this mere orphan of a girl may never be able to get them treated for the rest of her life.

She may still be alright while the orphanage is looking after her, but after that she won't have any options. If her eyes don't work, even searching for a job will be awful.

I can pretty much imagine how a sightless girl will end up in this world... maybe a slave, maybe a prostitute? Most likely something in that neighborhood.

Perhaps the granny at this orphanage will keep looking after this girl even after she becomes an adult, but that woman is quite old herself. Misfortune no doubt awaits this young girl in the not-too-distant future.

...Even as I'm mulling it over, Yuel is staring at me intently.

Yeah, those eyes are expecting something.

...In the past, I healed Yuel's eyes. They're clearly telling me she's under the impression that "my kind Master would never abandon this pitiful sightless child". Mixed in with the expectation that her master is about to do something cool, as well.

While Yuel is still staring at me with those eyes, the girl begins to speak again with her head downcast.

"Back at the festival, um, I heard that if I went to Saint-sama, she would surely

be able to heal these eyes. But, um, she stopped after the person in front of me, so it didn't work out."

"Ahhh. That, huh...?"

Now that I think about it, the saint was giving out free treatment since a few days before the festival. Was she hoping to receive treatment that way? But, judging from the fact that the saint couldn't cope with that Earth Dragon's petrifying breath, the saint can't cast EX Heal multiple times. She must have used up her mana right before getting to this kid.

"But, um, it's okay. Saint-sama gave me this, right, and she said if I have it then something good will surely happen so don't give up."

Saying that, the girl shows us the object in her hands.

"This is... a ring?"

From first glance, the ring looks expensive. It's made of gold, and adorned with a large gem. Plus the decorations are detailed; I get the feeling that in this world it would take quite a bit of money to make a ring of this quality. I bet it would fetch a rather good price.

...It's not some kind of weird magic item, is it? Like that earring Ruruka gave me. When I heard she got it from the saint, for some reason my guard went up. And apparently she said that something good will happen just by having it. First things first, let's try using Appraisal.

Ring

...Ain't it just a normal ring? Doesn't seem to be a magic item or anything. Nothing unusual about it, just a luxurious golden ring.

Which means, this is just a type of charity? She might have meant for the girl to sell this when she's truly in need.

"I heard that, um, Saint-sama is still in town. So as long as I have this, I know I'll get treated."

As she says that, the girl pats the ring.

...She must not know that the saint already left town. When she finds that out later, I wonder what kind of face this girl will make?

I avert my gaze from the girl, and Yuel is still looking at me. With sparkling eyes, looking at me.

...It can't be helped. I can't betray these eyes of hers.

If I abandoned this girl here, I wouldn't be worthy of Yuel's respect.

...Happily, that saint has already skipped town. Though I'm not saying I'll be completely open about my healing magic, it's probably not to the degree that I need to hide it when there's a patient in front of me.

Besides, this girl's eyes have always been able to see a little. As long as I make sure to forbid her to speak about it, I should be able to dodge the issue for a while. Then after some time passes, so long as she isn't told "that person healed you", she won't remember who exactly it was that healed her.

"What's your name?"

"Me...? Farah."

"I see, Farah.

...I have something to tell you. Can you come with me for a bit?"

Well, let's hope that she grows up to be a beauty like Eris and comes back looking to return the favor. I'll leave Yuel to keep the children company and go treat this girl.

At the time of treatment, I gave the sightless girl, Farah, two conditions.

The first one is, until she becomes an adult, she's not to let anyone know that she's now able to see. And the other one is that she can absolutely never tell anyone that I'm the one who treated her.

Well, since she's such a young girl I have my doubts as to whether or not she'll follow them properly, but I said what I had to say. Although she was just jubilantly rejoicing about "Something good really did happen! Thank you, Onii-chan!", so I'm not convinced she was listening carefully. Well, even though she should already be able to see, she still lets that granny feed her during

lunchtime, so it looks like she's abiding my conditions for the time being.

"Eris-chan, Shiki-san, Yuel-chan... thank you so much for helping me."

We finish lunch, and the orphanage granny politely gives us her thanks. Right, she's meeting someone after this, so we just need to look after the children in the meantime? Well, I say look after, but the baby is the only one that seems like it'd be a handful, and Eris is here too. I'm sure we'll manage somehow.

"I'll be welcoming Archbishop-sama in just a little, so until we finish talking, I'll be relying on you for a while longer."

"...! So the person you were meeting was Archbishop-sama...?"

When she hears the word archbishop, Eris' face distorts slightly.

"Yes, he had something to discuss about the donations. It wouldn't do for the children to say anything careless around Archbishop-sama, so... I'm counting on you, alright? I'm going to go wait for Archbishop-sama in front of the entrance."

The granny announces as she steps outside the orphanage.

...Something seems to be weighing on Eris' mind as well; she's making a difficult face. Oh yeah, before we came here she was saying that business is harsh here because the archbishop is skimming so much off of the donations. If that archbishop is here to talk about the donations, there's also the possibility that his plan is to lower them. That may be what Eris is concerned about.

"...Aaahh, waahhhh!"

—As I'm contemplating, the baby suddenly begins to cry in Eris' arms.

I wonder if it's because of the grim face Eris is making? When she realizes, she immediately switches to a gentle expression. After that, the next thing she does is check the baby's diaper,

"...This doesn't seem to be it."

and when she confirms that it's not the cause of the crying, she begins to comfort the baby by cradling it in her arms and gently rocking it. She seems used to that. Apparently it's true that she occasionally comes to this orphanage to help out. The baby doesn't stop crying so easily, though.

"...Perhaps it's hungry. But I just fed it..."

Now that I think about it, I'm pretty sure she was giving it something like milk out of a baby bottle during lunchtime. So it's not like it would be hungry again yet, either. Well, babies cry over the littlest of things. Rather, they even cry for no reason at all. And it's not like its complexion is bad, so finding a way to comfort it is probably the best approach.

—And, as I'm mulling it over,

"Eris-san, won't you let the baby drink from your boobs?"

Yuel blurts that out.

Instantly, Eris stops moving. She's just looking into Yuel's eyes like she can't understand Yuel's intent. By suggesting to let it drink from her boobs, does Yuel mean that Eris should feed the baby her mother's milk?



"...W-Will anything come out?"

When my doubts arise, I try asking,

"T-There's no way... there's no way it would, right!?"

and Eris becomes flustered and denies it.

...Well yeah, if it did, that would mean that Eris is currently several months pregnant. If Eris got pregnant unbeknownst to me, I would probably keel over from the shock. And I still haven't put my hands on her yet.

...Perhaps startled by Eris' shouting, the baby's crying grows more intense.

"U-Um, Eris-san, I-I'm sorry..."

Yuel seems to misunderstand that Eris is mad at her, and lowers her head in dismay.

"...Ah, h-hold on! ...T-That's not it, Yuel-chan! I-I'm not mad. It's just that, um, milk won't... i-if you're not pregnant, it won't come out, alright? I-It's not something that comes out just because your b-breasts are large."

"...O-Oh, is that how it is?"

"T-That's right, that's why my, um... milk, won't come out."

Eris demonstrates the high-level technique of comforting Yuel with words while comforting the baby by rocking it back and forth. She clears up Yuel's misunderstanding, and gradually gets the baby to stop crying as well.

...But man, how do I say this... the image of Eris taking care of a baby fits her to a tee.

...Even though she's supposedly never been married, it's as if I've already come to see that baby as Eris' child. I wonder why? Is it because of those huge tits?

"That really suits you..."

By the time I notice, my thoughts have already leaked out. Did Eris hear that? She looks at me.

...Eris stops rocking the baby, and she's staring at me. Her face seems a little surprised.

...After that, she looks at the baby in her arms. I notice the hint of a smile in her expression.

...Then once again, she looks at me. She's staring intently. Wait, although she's looking at me, somehow it also seems like she's just staring off into space. I wonder what she's thinking about? It feels like her mind is elsewhere.

"W-what do you mean, i-it suits me...?"

However Eris quickly turns around in a fluster, and resumes comforting the baby. Whoa, I wonder what this—

The instant I try to think about it.

"...Master, I'm picking up some strange signs. I'm going to take a quick look outside. I don't sense any hostility, but if anything happens while I'm away, please use this."

The moment I wonder if Yuel is going to say something about it, she hands something over to me and jumps out the window.

...Strange signs? I wonder if there's something outside.

Hey, the thing Yuel gave me... it's a smoke bomb. The same kind she used before at the beauty contest plaza.

Out of curiosity, I take a look out the window Yuel jumped through... but there's nothing there. Yuel must have gone off somewhere already; I can't see her.

"Archbishop-sama, truly, thank you very much for coming out of your way on this occasion. It is not much, but please welcome yourself to this humble abode."

At the same time, I hear the granny's voice from the direction of the entrance. Looks like the archbishop has just arrived.

...What, don't tell me she was just sensing the archbishop?

Then, as I'm analyzing Yuel's behavior,

"Looks like he's here... H-huh? Where's Farah-chan?"

Eris wonders aloud. I look around, and indeed one of the children is missing. It's Farah. Farah is gone.

"S-She isn't here!?"

"Yes, I'm fairly sure she was here until just recently, though..."

Did she end up going off somewhere while we were calming down the baby?

But this timing is not great.

...I saw that archbishop once in person, back at the beauty contest. If an innocent child bumped into that chubby archbishop, they might blurt out "Wahh, it's a piggy!" or something. The church is this orphanage's lifeline. If they say something like that, he may cut off the donations to the orphanage and it'll end up going bankrupt. And Farah is still young, so we need to find her quickly.

Oh right, should I have Yuel track her down? Ah, that may not work. She went off somewhere, and hasn't returned yet.

...She said "signs", was that not referring to the archbishop?

Oh well.

"I'll go search for her. You look after the children, Eris."

Well, I can pretty much guess why Farah might've gone off somewhere. She just obtained proper eyesight. Most likely, she wanted to go have a look at various places around the orphanage.

"Now then, where could she be?"

This orphanage isn't very big. I should be able to find her within a few minutes. For starters, I'll check the nearby rooms.

"...Not here, huh."

She's not inside this one. I'll search the next room.

"...No, wait?"

Inside the room, there's a large closet that looks big enough to hide a single person. Don't tell me she's hiding in there? I'll check it just to be sure.

"...Not there, huh?"

There are a lot of children's clothes inside, though.

...Ah, there are undergarments too. Well, it's not like I'd have any interest in the underwear of the children from this orphanage, naturally. And, as I'm about to close the closet,

"I swear, this place is so dusty."

"I'm terribly sorry... please, use this room."

—from just outside the room, I hear voices.

Sounds like the archbishop and that granny are about to enter this room. Within a few seconds, I hear the clank of the doorknob turning.

"...Mm? Did you hear a noise just now?"

"No, I'm afraid I did not."

...Ah, I shall go and fetch you some tea right away."

"Forget the tea. You think I would drink anything in this filthy place? Besides, this won't take long."

I'm in a cramped, dark space. All I can hear are the voice of the granny and the sullen archbishop who just entered the room.

...The fact that I reflexively hid inside the closet is that thing, y'know, a conditioned response. I mean look, they may be children's things but there's underwear in here. And if I happened to be spotted opening the closet, I might be mistaken for some kind of lolicon pervert.

"Let us get down to business. The donation to this orphanage is being increased."

"I-Increased!?"

"Yes, until now there seems to have been an... omission in the orphanage survey."

...Although, how long should I stay in here? The archbishop said their talk would be over soon, so it probably won't take that long. And if I came out now, it would be totally suspicious.

"T-Thank you very much, Archbishop-sama! Truly, thank you so much!"

As I'm listening to their conversation out of boredom, I hear the granny's gratified voice expressing her thanks.

...Wait a minute, the donation is being increased? Eris was saying that the current archbishop is stingy with money, but I wonder if that's not actually the case?

"My subordinates are currently surveying the number of orphans at this orphanage as well as the state of deterioration of the building. The exact amount of the increase will depend on the results. Now then, sign these documents. They're to verify that my eminent self personally performed a careful inspection of the orphanage."

...No, just from the archbishop's voice, I can sense some considerable unpleasantness. I mean, this archbishop just openly clicked his tongue. This increase was probably not what he originally intended.

—Now that I think about it, back at the time of that beauty contest.

I'm pretty sure the saint mentioned something about having a talk with the lord concerning the donations. By some chance, did the ensuing conversation between the saint and the lord about this matter result in them taking a scalpel to the archbishop's donation embezzlement?

Somehow, I get the feeling I'm on to something.

The archbishop doubtlessly claimed that there was an oversight in the orphanage survey as his excuse. I was wondering why someone in such a high position as archbishop would be coming to the orphanage in person, but this too must be his way of appealing to the lord. That middle-aged lord was doing his job properly, huh.

As I'm pondering, I hear the sound of footsteps from outside. Then, the sound of the door opening. Apparently somebody else has entered the room.

"Archbishop-sama, there's an urgent matter..."

"What."

I'm guessing it's one of those subordinates that the archbishop mentioned earlier. They must be whispering since I can't make out what they're saying, but I can tell they're having a discussion..

"R-Really!?"

After a short while, the archbishop bellows in excitement.

"You really found one!? T-There's no mistake, right!?"

The archbishop goes on and on in a loud voice. I wonder what's up? Did something happen? I'm a bit interested.

I glance around a little, and inside the closet, I find a place where a sliver of light reaches. It's probably a ventilation hole so the clothes don't get mildewed. I decide to peek through it.

"Yes, of course.

...Although, Archbishop-sama, if I may, a slightly lower voice would be..."

"Y-Yeah... possesses... saint... moreover, a woman?"

When I take a peek, I can see the archbishop and his subordinate having a conversation. But since their voices are low, I can only hear bits and pieces of it. All I heard were the words "saint" and "woman".

Man... he sure is chubby, that archbishop. Especially around the waist. His girth is pressing against his priest robes, and seems like it could break free at any moment. What's more, perhaps because of all the rings he's got stuffed onto his hands for whatever reason, his fingers poking out from his sleeves end up looking like boneless ham. It's not very becoming, in fact it's a little unsightly.

"Yes. I doubted my ears at first, but it's reliable information."

The subordinate speaks. Although, what are they talking about? Is the

information that made him doubt his ears related to what the archbishop said about the saint and a woman...? For a moment I was worried that they found out about my EX Heal, but I don't get the part about a woman. And something tells me it's not related to me.

...Rather, those rings the archbishop is wearing. I decided to use Appraisal on them, and they're mana capacity raising magic tools. All of those rings jangling around on his hands, every last one of them. That's insane, oi. It explains why that archbishop can use EX Heal, too. With a collection that big, just how many times can he cast it?

"Archbishop-sama, whatever is the matter?"

Perhaps suspicious of the archbishop's state of affairs, the granny calls out to him.

"No, nothing at all. However, it would seem I'm going to be a bit busy, so I shall be taking my leave at this juncture."

The archbishop announces that as he hastily rises from his seat. I wonder if the orphanage survey is done already? Doesn't seem like it is, though.

"U-Um, Archbishop-sama, the papers are still...!"

"Hmph... such things will no longer be necessary."

In contrast to the flustered granny, the archbishop leaves the room in a chipper mood.

...What the heck was that all about? And that granny is standing frozen in place with papers in hand, too. Besides, I thought that those papers were most likely a relatively important item to be delivered to the lord, but is that not the case?

"..."

Or perhaps I should say, won't you hurry up and leave the room too, granny? I kinda need to use the toilet... I'd like to leave this closet soon.

We've finished taking care of the children, and we're on our way back from the orphanage. The three of us, Eris, Yuel and I, are walking down the road to

the hospital.

After I left that closet, I soon understood the meaning of the archbishop's conversation. The ring Farah had, which she received from the saint. Apparently it was taken by the archbishop's underling.

"Taking things from children, how horrible..."

Eris says with an angry-looking face. Eris realized that Farah's ring was taken after the archbishop's group had left. Doesn't look like she was able to get it back. Well, as far as I could tell from eavesdropping on them, it sounded like something fairly important. Even if she had asked him to return it, he probably wouldn't have given it back.

"Yeah, I know."

Well, it's a shame about Farah's ring, but there's nothing I can do. It was an expensive ring, but in the end a ring is just a ring. I don't want to make an enemy out of a powerful person over a mere ring. The risk is too great.

And Farah herself wasn't bothered about it at all, saying "Something good already happened, so it's fine". She also didn't understand how much it was worth, though.

Eris most likely didn't directly see the ring either. She's a little angry, but just a little. She thinks that what was taken was just a ring the children were using to play house, though. If I told her it was a golden ring, she would likely flip out. Eris is scary when she gets truly mad. One slip of the tongue and she seems like she would go storm the archbishop's place. Let's change the subject.

"Hey Yuel. That reminds me, what were those strange signs you mentioned?"

I remembered something. At the same time the archbishop arrived, Yuel jumped out the orphanage window and went somewhere. Although by the time I left the closet and met up with Eris, Yuel had already returned. Leaving Farah aside, I wonder what exactly Yuel was up to?

"Err, there was a beast girl on the roof of the orphanage."

"A beast girl?"

"Yes, with doglike ears, a girl around the same age as me. She seemed to be

monitoring the orphanage."

Why would a beast girl be on top of the orphanage's roof? For a moment, I wonder if I'm being watched by somebody connected to the saint, but the saint already returned to the royal capital. Besides, Yuel only detected the signs after we came to the orphanage. If I was under some sort of observation, I assume Yuel would've detected it while we were in the hospital, or the instant we went outside.

...Don't tell me it was just a neighborhood kid who wanted to play with the children in the orphanage? In that case it would all fit.

"And then what happened?"

"When I chased her, she ran away."

I can just imagine Hunter Yuel-san chasing down a beast with a knife, but that's probably not how it went down. She probably ran off when Yuel tried to talk to her, or something. And according to Yuel she's still a child, so maybe she was just shy.

As my conversation with Yuel carries on, Eris sighs deeply.

"What's the matter?"

"No... it's just that Archbishop-sama, I really do hate him. And there's Farah's ring, too... he passed by me on his way out, and he gave me this incredibly repulsive look... for just a second."

Do you hate being looked at with lascivious eyes? Well, as for me, I can't help but look at Eris' nicely plump hips or her giant tits, though.

...For the time being, I should be careful too. However, Eris' expression quickly shifts to one of amazement.

"At any rate, the children sure loved you. They were saying how they want Onii-chan to come teach them origami again."

She must have realized that talking about it won't change anything. Eris

changes the subject. Apparently the kids properly reported my activities to Eris. Nice. With this, I've achieved my goal for the day.

"Moreover... Farah-chan's eyes, you healed them, didn't you?"

Whoa, how do you know about that, Eris-san?

"...Did Farah tell you that?"

"I could tell from how delighted her face was. I told you, didn't I? I've been coming to this orphanage every now and then."

For a moment I doubted Farah, but looks like that's not what happened.

...Well, since Eris visits the orphanage regularly, I guess she would notice the change.

"It seemed like you didn't want your true healing ability to be seen, so I didn't ask you before, though... You know, I've been worried about that girl for a long time."

Eris remarks with a gentle expression.

...I wonder if Eris, knowing that I want to hide my healing magic, has been troubled this whole time with the desire to ask me to treat Farah?

"...It wasn't really that big of a deal."

But well, in terms of effort, it really wasn't a big deal. It would be bad if I was discovered, but it's not like there will be any problems from Eris finding out that I used EX Heal. However, Eris is staring directly into my eyes as if to say that it was an incredibly important thing.

"Thank you for healing Farah."

Then, Eris says that and smiles softly.

"...S-Sure."

Maybe it's because Eris rarely shows me such a genuine smile, but my heart skips a beat. This is bad. Even though it shouldn't be a big deal, my face is getting a little warm. I'm having a little trouble looking her directly in the eyes, and I unconsciously end up averting my eyes.

"Master?"

Perhaps having doubts about the state I'm in, Yuel comes to peer into my face.

...Danger, danger. I can't let Yuel realize that Eris' smile got my heart all aflutter.

I don't know if she'll cry or what, but doubtlessly it won't have a good effect on her. I hide my face behind my hands for a second to reset my expression.

"Don't worry about it. Let's hurry back."

After that, I lightly pet Yuel's head to dodge the issue. Yuel is still tilting her head, but when I pet it again, she contentedly nestles her head into my hand.

"Yes, Master."

For some reason, Yuel's high voice echoes in my empty head.

It's late at night on the same day we returned from the orphanage.

A knocking sound on the door of the hospital awakens me. The room is dark. Judging from the moonlight streaming in from outside, it's most likely still around 2 am. A visitor at a time like this?

"Mm... perhaps someone needs urgent treatment. I'll go have a look."

"Yeah."

Looks like Eris woke up as well; she puts on her coat and leaves the room.

Although, treatment at this time of night? I remember the time Ruruka came to ask me to heal Fran and Sera. Don't tell me it's her again?

...No, Ruruka should be at the lord's place right now. She shouldn't need to go out of her way to ask me, there ought to be one or two excellent healers there already.

The knocking sound at the door stops.

Most likely, Eris is dealing with it.

...Should I go too? Eris ought to be able to manage it by herself if it's a cold or

a minor injury, but it's someone expressly coming this late at night. It might be a severe illness or a wound on the level of a missing body part. After I softly peel Yuel (who's clinging to me in her sleep) off of me so as not to wake her up, I head downstairs.

"Huh, Eris... where are you?"

However, Eris isn't in the treatment room. Actually, there isn't even a light on in the room. Even though this is where she always listens to the patients' symptoms and casts her healing magic...

She's not in the hallway either, nor is she at the entrance.

And then I notice.

...For some reason, the front door is slightly ajar.

"Eris?"

Is she outside? But why would she go outside? I wonder if, by some chance, someone was transported here on a stretcher or something and she went outside to treat them? But wait, for the kind of wound that would require transportation via stretcher, she would have come to call me over right away.

I peer out from the entrance, and nobody is there.

"...Eris, seriously, where did you go?"

I go out as far as the alley, and look around.

When I do, there's something there. But not Eris.

It's dark and there's some distance between us, so I can't see that well... but there are the figures of about 5 men. I see their silhouettes running off towards a back alley.

...Eris isn't in the hospital. The front door has been left open. The silhouettes of a group running away.

It's not like there's positive proof in that direction. But, the moment I spot that group running off, my whole body breaks out in goosebumps. I have a bad feeling about this.

Most likely, that's what happened.

Eris... has been kidnapped.

Chapter 57: Pursuit

In the distance, I see the silhouettes running off into a back alley. I'm going to lose sight of them at this rate. Reflexively, I follow after them as they disappear into the back alley.

As I turn down the alley in pursuit, I spot five shadows a few dozen meters ahead. I strain my eyes and try to get a good look.

...One of the five is carrying something over his shoulder.

Just what could he be holding? I have a bad feeling about this. The closer I get as I run, their figures gradually become more distinct.

It's a sack.

One of the five shapes is carrying a sack, large enough to hold a single person. And that sack is wriggling, as if there really is someone inside...

"Tch... stop struggling!!"

One of them drives his fist into it, upon which it stops moving and goes limp.

—No doubt about it. Inside that sack, there's a person.

...Eris wasn't in the hospital. And the front door was left open. The one inside that sack is... Eris, presumably.

But why Eris? Is the public order in the city this bad? What's their goal? Ransom? Or is it her body? Questions spring up, but I don't have time to think about them right now. If I lose sight of them once, it's over. For now, I need to catch up with those men no matter what.

As the alley bends, the men run down one narrow path after another. But the silver lining to this cloud is that because they're carrying Eris, I should be able to catch up with them. I quiet my footsteps as I get closer, and retrieve my mace from my item box. I'm about to rush in and start swinging at them — but I notice something as I approach.

...All of them are armed.

They have swords, knives, and various other weapons in easy-to-reach

positions. Even though I'm at a 1 vs. 5 disadvantage, they even have weapons?

Should I have woken Yuel before I chased after these guys? No, Yuel was on the second floor of the hospital, and moreover, she was sound asleep. If I went back to wake her up, I very likely would've lost sight of these guys.

...But facing five opponents by myself, my chances of victory are slim.

...What do I do? Do I fight? Do I call for help?

It's late at night. The neighborhood is deathly still. It seems like these men have chosen places with no signs of people to run to, as I haven't come across a single person I could call for help.

I wonder if someone would come if I shouted in a loud voice?

...Nah, it'd be bad if those guys noticed my presence.

A 1 vs. 5 against armed men. No matter how advanced my healing magic is, it's not like I'm invincible. If I get surrounded by 5 people, and they thrust a sword into my head from behind, it'll mean certain death even for me. Perhaps these guys will finish me off and run off somewhere else before any help arrives.

Besides, even if someone does come to help, there are five opponents. Even if I had people with knight-class ability, I doubt we could win with just one or two of them. And even if people just strong enough to win come, it's possible that a few of these men could hold us off while the one holding Eris escapes. If I lose sight of them once, I have no way of finding them again.

...If that happens, it's all over.

I could maybe have the knights investigate the next day, but the next day is no good. Eris is a totally charming woman of a marriageable age. If I let time pass after she's kidnapped, I don't know what will happen to her.

I continue to follow the men indecisively, making sure not to lose sight of them or let them notice me.

Think. Think, dammit. Of some way to save Eris from those men. Just rescuing

her isn't good enough; I'll need to have a plan for how to get away from those five once I have Eris in my arms.

Hit the man carrying Eris from behind, then once I've recovered her, scatter some Slime Jelly?

...No, such a makeshift strategy is no good. If I'm carrying Eris, the men will probably catch up to me in less than a minute.

Oh right, I received a smoke bomb from Yuel at the orphanage.

Can't I use this to get away from them? ...No, but even if there's a smokescreen it won't erase the sound of my footsteps. It's late at night. Since there aren't any people in the streets, my footsteps will ring out clearly. Right now they're running too so they haven't noticed my presence, but if they listen carefully for me, it'll be a simple matter to determine which way I run off.

Rather, if I attack them from behind, can I even rescue Eris? Even if I attack the one carrying Eris over his back, I can only picture the other four immediately beating me up. Besides, if the five of them split with some carrying Eris while the rest detain me... that would be the worst. In the end, I would lose sight of Eris right there.

Most likely, for Eris, everything is hanging on my actions. I absolutely can't screw this up.

What do I do? What would be the best approach...?

...As I continue to rack my brain, the men slow their running pace. I wonder if it's because they've gotten enough distance from the hospital?

"Nice job."

"Yeah."

Just like that, the men start a conversation.

"Jeez, Archbishop-sama sure is rough on his men, huh? All like "Today, quickly go kidnap that woman"."

The hell did he just say? Archbishop...? Why did that name come out just

now?

...Is the archbishop the one behind Eris' abduction?

"Seriously."

"Well, it's fine, ain't it? This is the last job for us, right?"

"Yeah, true."

Besides, he said "today, quickly". In other words, does that mean that the reason for Eris' kidnapping arose today?

I was together with Eris all day today. Let me rethink today's events.

"..."

Having come this far, I finally understand. The reason why Eris was kidnapped by members of the church.

...That reason can't be anything other than my EX Heal, can it?

What happened today... Eris and I went to the orphanage. At the orphanage, I used EX Heal on Farah.

At the time, the archbishop's underlings were supposedly looking around the orphanage to confirm its state of deterioration. And, when I went off to search for Farah... I couldn't find her right away.

...Don't tell me that she met with one of the archbishop's subordinates?

Since I healed Farah's eyes with EX Heal, she was suddenly able to see straight when she couldn't before. She was totally elated. That's precisely why, when her precious ring that she received from the saint was taken away, she was able to forgive it with a smile. I'm sure that everything she saw was fresh to her, so she wasn't able to contain her joy.

...That girl is still a 7-year-old child. Maybe it was inevitable that she'd want to share her joyous feelings with somebody. If she were to blurt out the fact that her sightless eyes were treated to anyone nearby... there wouldn't be anything strange about that.

But if Farah had told the archbishop's underling that I'm the one who healed her, right now I'd be the one inside that sack instead of Eris. Something... feels a little off.

...Wait, I reminded Farah to "absolutely never tell anyone that I'm the one who healed you". I'm sure that even if Farah told the archbishop's underling that she received treatment, she definitely would've obeyed that part. So, when the archbishop's subordinate pressed her with questions, she must have said *that*.

Instead of me, she said "Eris-san healed them".

If that's the case, everything makes sense.

The conversation between the archbishop and his underling that I heard while I was hiding in the closet. That wasn't about the ring that Farah received from the saint. It was about them misconstruing that Eris had the same level of healing magic ability as the saint.

Why was Eris kidnapped on the archbishop's orders? Maybe the church has expectations related to EX Heal for her after all. I don't know what kind of expectations, though. But stuffing her into a sack and carrying her away, I can't imagine they're going to be completely above-board ones.

This isn't some invitation to an important post within the church, like I naively imagined.

Kidnapping someone is a criminal act. Even for the church, if it came to light that they did such a thing, it would likely be a huge scandal. And yet, the fact that the church abducted Eris... that means they're confident that she won't ever report it to the knights or the lord.

Why would the church be so confident that they won't be indicted for kidnapping Eris? Either they're sure that Eris will come to an agreement with them after a discussion, or they intend to take away her freedom to report it.

There's no doubt in my mind, it has to be the latter. I don't know what method they're going to use. Maybe a slave crest, maybe locking her up somewhere... or maybe they even intend to kill her. At the very least, if I let these guys get away now, I'm sure that Eris will never see the light of day again

for the rest of her life.

"But..."

My opponent is an archbishop of the church. He oversees this city and the surrounding region, a leader among leaders. He's rich, plus he has influence and that unit of men that he can even order to commit criminal acts. In the worst case, he may have more power than the lord of this city.

Supposing I do succeed in rescuing Eris, what about the aftermath? I could appeal to the lord, but the influence of the archbishop, and the Church of Medine as the state religion of this country, is great. There's even the possibility that the lord would prioritize the archbishop over me.

In that case... a fugitive existence.

Within the walls of this city, we'd have to remain hidden while scurrying from place to place. Even if we fled from the city, monsters would be waiting outside.

The future ahead of me is looking grim. I can't make an enemy of authority. I should have known such a thing.

Follow the men. Just keep following them.

But no plan is coming to mind for how to rescue Eris and get away. I can't think of a single good way to overturn the circumstances, neither in the short term nor the long term. Eris is an important existence to me. I have to protect her no matter what.

...That's exactly why I won't be able to forgive myself if I jump in without thinking and lose sight of her.

And, as I'm agonizing over it while I follow behind the men... we arrive.

At the church. It really was the church. The men carry Eris through the main gates of the church without hesitation and head inside.

N-No, this isn't the time to be startled.

I need to follow them. Letting Eris out of my sight would be unwise. But... after all, walking in through the front door would be a suicidal act.

...I take a look around the church, and one of the windows on the first floor is open. I'll sneak in through the window; there's no other way.

Using the bushes as cover, I approach the window while staying out of the moonlight, and peek in through it.

There are 1, 2, 3... 4 beds inside.

...This appears to be a bedroom for people who work at the church. Doesn't seem like anyone is currently using it though; there are no signs of people. I enter the room through the window, and swiftly approach the door.

After that, to avoid making any sound, I open the door softly.

Nobody's there.

...However, I can hear voices. Hurriedly, I continue down the hallway in the direction of the voices. Quickly, but making sure not to cause any noise.

After a short time, I come out into an open area.

This place, where ephemeral moonlight shines in through stained glass, must be the so-called place of worship.

Concealing my body, I peek into the place of worship... and Eris is there. Looks like they've taken her out of the sack; her arms and legs are bound and her mouth is gagged.

Also... including the archbishop and those men, there are around ten church members present. I was hoping it was a lie, but it would seem the archbishop truly was the ringleader behind this kidnapping.

Eris is glaring at the archbishop from a prone position on the ground. Looks like she's regained consciousness. I was worried when that man hit her from over the sack, but it must not have been anything serious.



"M-Mmmh.... mmmph-!"

Eris tries to say something to the archbishop in protest. But since her mouth is gagged, she can't form the words.

As I observe from around the corner, I notice Eris' legs trembling slightly.

...Well, naturally. She was abducted all of a sudden. Furthermore, she was struck, restrained, and is currently lying on the ground. Anxiety and fear must be dominating her mind.

I want to get her out of here right away.

...But, there are so many enemies. If I rush in without a strategy, without a doubt I'll just die in vain. It's vital for me to stay calm and think carefully.

As I thought, it would be impossible for me to extricate her by myself. However, this is unmistakably the destination they were carrying Eris to. From now on, if I can quickly call for help, it may be possible to rescue Eris before any danger befalls her. And the minute I think that,

"For the longest time, I've been searching for a woman like you."

the archbishop takes something out of his pocket and turns to address Eris. What's he holding in his hand... a jewel? It's a small gemstone with a pale violet glimmer to it.

"Enough mana capacity to even use EX Heal. And that body, as if you were the real succubus in the flesh. You are assuredly the very ideal vessel I have been seeking."

"...!"

When Eris hears "EX Heal", her head droops as if she's come to a realization. Then, not showing the slightest indication of trying to deny it, she goes silent. The archbishop pays her no heed and continues his monologue.

"With you as the vessel, I can finally revive the succubus sealed within this jewel in her complete form... I've waited so long, truly, I've waited so long for this day."

...Revive the succubus? What the hell is this guy talking about?

...Wait, it was written in the Bible of the Church of Medine that the succubus was sealed by the church. And this guy is an archbishop of that very same church. Could he actually know the method to revive her...?

...And besides, that word "vessel". I have an extremely bad feeling about it.

"Think of it as an honor. In the final moments of your life, I will personally instruct you in the joys of being a woman, in full. You will need to be experienced, after all. And lewdness is also necessary in order to raise the compatibility between the succubus and the vessel."

"...!"

Is he already imagining Eris nude? The archbishop's nostrils flare as he proclaims with a vulgar face. His hands reach out towards Eris, tied up on the ground. What's going to happen next? Judging from the archbishop's repulsive face and his speech just now I can pretty much predict it, though I'd rather not.

No good... I don't have time to call for help.

—Even now, that man's hands are trying to touch Eris. And the other church

members seem to be complicit; they're gazing on with amusement.

The only one here who can come to Eris' aid is me. I have to do something.

It's not a sure-fire strategy to get away from these guys. But if I leave the church now to call for help, I'll surely regret it.

I don't have time to hesitate anymore. I plunge my hand into my item box.

And I take out the smoke bomb.

In any case, I'll obscure their vision with a smokescreen and take Eris out of this church. After that, I'll bring her with me as run with all my might while shouting for help.

...Although I have no idea how far away I'll get. They may catch me immediately.

But... I have to do it.

"S-Smoke!? Is there a fire!?"

"It's a smokescreen! Shit, did the knights sniff us out!?"

"No, that's not it, it's a lone man! The exit, bar the exit!"

I approach within the smoke, lift Eris up with both hands, and run with all my might. Since I set off the smoke bomb indoors, I can't even see a meter in front of me in the current situation. Relying on my memory, I head in a straight line towards the exit.

...Within the spreading smoke, my eyes meet with Eris' in my arms. Her mouth is gagged, but I don't have the leeway to remove it right now. When Eris sees my face, her eyes become a little watery.

"Sorry, Eris. This happened because of my healing magic... but I'm going to try my best to get you out of this."

"Mm...mmph..."

Eris mutters something or other and buries her face in my chest; perhaps her tension has loosened.

...I'm sure that she was truly frightened. But it's too early to feel relieved. The struggle from this point forward will decide whether or not we get away.

"Are you serious..."

Immediately after that, I pick up the signs. My way forward... the exit, is already defended. There are perhaps three or four people there.

I turn on the spot to find a different way out.

I can't see that well in front of me due to the smokescreen, but at any rate all I can do for now is run away. I turn my head full circle, remembering the layout before I used the smoke bomb, and run with all my might.

"Oi, over here! He's over here! "

At the same time I come out into the hallway where the smoke is thin, I hear a voice behind me. My senses tell me that the sound of footsteps is getting closer. If we're caught by that number of people, it's over for us. In any event, if I don't find some way out of this church soon...!

Holding Eris, I continue running down the hallway.

"Don't think we'll let you get away with this!"

"Don't let the man return alive under any circumstances! Take back the woman!"

The archbishop's underlings are chasing us from behind. Their voices are steadily getting closer.

...This is impossible after all. With me carrying Eris, they'll soon catch up.

And the second I think that— I see a door nearby.

I dive through the door and immediately glance around.

...Looks like this is a resting room, too. There are multiple beds laid out within. I hurriedly close the door, and go to lock it... but this door doesn't have a lock.

I can hear the footsteps outside getting closer. Oh crap, oh crap.

However, right beside the door there's a large closet. I lower Eris onto a bed temporarily,

"U-O-OHHHHHHHHHHH!!!"

and then, with all my strength, I push the nearby closet over in the direction of the door. The closet makes a loud thud as it falls in front of the door.

—Immediately afterwards, the doorknob rattles. However, it doesn't open. The fallen closet is jammed between the pillars, successfully blocking the door.

"So much racket, what time do you think it is!? Lemme sleep! ...Fer cryin' out loud."

My relief is short-lived. This time, a voice comes from inside the room.

"Bardas! So you were in there! Kill that man and open the door! Right this instant!"

The voice of that archbishop comes from the other side of the door.

I scan over the inside of the room one more time.

...On the opposite wall, there's a window that looks large enough for a person to fit through. Standing between me and that window is a big, muscular man.

...Most likely, he was sleeping on a bed until just now. Since I was in a hurry, I didn't notice him. Then the man, whom the archbishop called Bardas, looks at me.

"Y-You..."

"...Whaaat? What exactly is goin' on here?"

This guy, I remember him.

Back when Ruruka and I discovered that dragon together in the old town. He's that thuggish priest who passed by us soon afterwards on our way back.

—A certain possibility crosses my mind.

The dragon used in the raid on the saint at the beauty contest, and this priest who was nearby. Now that they've kidnapped Eris, I don't think that the two are

unrelated.

...Don't tell me that the raid on the saint was also the archbishop's doing?

—Everything clicks into place in my head.

That archbishop, he claimed that his goal was to bring back the succubus. And from the word "vessel", the reason they abducted Eris... in order to revive the succubus, a woman capable of using EX Heal... no, perhaps "a woman" "with enough mana" to use EX Heal, is necessary. For that purpose, the archbishop no doubt set up the attack to coincide with the festival so he could target the saint when she visited this town.

In the raid on the saint, they used monster-manipulating collars that are often employed by evil god adherents. There's a bit of a problem with that. Magic tools are fundamentally expensive. How in the hell would some evil god cult stock up such a vast quantity of magic tools?

Even if they bought up all the ones produced by the labyrinth, even if they were doing their own research and development, either way they would have needed a huge amount of money.

...Most likely, the archbishop was using the welfare money he squeezed out of the surrounding region as his source of funds.

"That man is trying to run away with the vessel woman! Kill him and take back the woman!"

The man called Bardas looks at me and Eris and makes a short whistle. Then he speaks.

"Oi oi oi oi, this here's the vessel woman you were talkin' about? She got a niiice body, don't she! Hey, Archbishop-sama, yer gonna turn 'er into the succubus like we planned, yeah? ...Innat case, ain't no problem if'n I get a little taste of her first, riiight!?"

"Wait, I was going to do it! You're just a mere hoodlum, who do you think hired you into the church! ...But, well, today is a day to commemorate. If you kill

that man, you'll get your turn too before we make her into the succubus."

The man and the archbishop completely ignore Eris' will in their conversation. An uncomfortable sweat runs down my back.

...These guys live in a different world than me. They don't feel the slightest hesitation towards killing me or harming Eris. It would seem that Eris has gotten dragged into something truly ugly.

"...Yeah, I guess. Anyhow, I'm gonna get to do whatever the hell I want with the gals in town once the succubus revives. Might as well warm up first, huh?"

The man called Bardas looks at me. He's a muscular man. And he's tall. His physique is overwhelmingly superior to mine. I try using the Appraisal skill... and there's something called Grappling Arts.

He's a skill holder, to boot? Even one-on-one, this could be seriously tough.

But if I don't defeat this guy, it doesn't seem like we can escape.

From outside, I can hear the door being hit hard in order to force it open. I don't know how long that door will hold. It seems solidly made, so it shouldn't be smashed that easily, but...

Yet if they do bust down the door, I'll be caught in a pincer attack between this man and the others, and then I'd be finished for sure. I'll defeat this guy before the door gets smashed in, and escape through the window.

He who strikes first wins. I put my strength into my fist and take aim.

"UOOOHHHHHHHHH!!"

I'll aim at his chin. There's no time. I'll knock him out with a swift strike.

"Yeah, let's go for an arm first."

However, he grabs my arm. Then, swinging the arm up, he proceeds to twist it.

"Gh, aaahhhhhh...!"

...However, the man instantly reduces the force slightly. As if he finds my pain amusing, he alternates between putting his strength into it and loosening up.

When I look at his face, he's grinning.

...I'm being toyed with.

"A-Aaaaahhhhhhhhh!"

Then, there's a sudden snapping sound. A heavy, dull pain attacks my arm and echoes through my brain. It's broken. With no hesitation, he fucking broke it.

"What gives, yer just a weakling, aintcha?"

The man makes a bold smile as he speaks. I already knew it, but... this guy is strong.

By the time I notice, I'm drawing back. Step by step, I back away.

...His Grappling Arts skill. He's a size bigger than me, and has that muscular physique. I need to defeat him immediately and get out of here, but I can't see myself winning. Unconsciously, I end up taking a distance.

—When I do, my foot hits something.

It's a bit of a soft sensation. I look down at my feet... and Eris is there, still gagged. She's looking at my broken arm with a bitter face.

—The realization hits me. It's only a broken arm.

I'm the only one who can save Eris now. This isn't the time to be backing away leisurely. No matter the cost, I have to defeat this man.

One more time, I turn back to the man. I prepare my resolve. The main swings at the other arm this time. I aim for his chin again.

"Yeah yeah, this'll be the second one."

It's a reenactment of the previous time. The man laughs in contempt and twists my arm forcefully. My joints scream in agony, and it feels like my whole body is being dragged along by my arm.

—Eris is behind me.

Resisting the force the man is putting into my arm, I push against it with all my power. With a snap, the sensation of stiffness in my arm disappears. With the exception of the arm that's being held, I'm freed.

"Wha...!?"

Surprised that I would break my own arm, the man's eyes open wide.

—I drive my right arm, the one he broke originally, into his dumb-looking face.

It was only a broken arm. I can use healing magic. Something to this extent doesn't even count as an injury.

"Bastard, that arm... yer a healer, huh. But y'know, this is how you throw a punch!!"

Before I notice, his fist is sinking into my abdomen.

...It's no use. My punch wasn't effective at all.

An unpleasant watery sound comes from within my body. The contents of my stomach rise up to my throat. My knees grow unsteady, and for a moment, it seems like I'm going to fall towards the man.

"Mmh—!"

I hear Eris' muffled shriek.

"EX Heal."

I cast healing magic.

—Losing is not an option.

Straining all my power that the healing magic returned to me, I grab the man's head, and bash my own head into it. I stagger a little from the pain, but the same goes for him.

"Gah... y-you bastard, don't get carried away!"

Shaking his head lightly, the man raises his fist. He probably wasn't expecting a counterattack.

...His attacks are becoming more pronounced from his rage. If it's like this, even I can tell. A straight right, to the head, that's what this guy is aiming for.

I can't move to avoid it. Because I... was thinking the same thing. But, I don't need to avoid it. I throw a straight right at full force as well.

—My fist hits the man's face right on the chin, and his fist smashes into my chin.

"EX Heal."

I cast healing magic.

I see the man look down as he stumbles unsteadily. Now's my chance. I have no need for something like moderation. I retrieve my mace from my item box, and aiming for the man's head, I swing it down at full power.

—With this, it's over.

"U-UOOOOHHHHHHH!!!"

"Shit, shiiiiiiiiit!!"

However, just before my mace makes a direct hit on the man, he grabs my arm and crushes it.

"AAaahhhh!"

Twisting my arm, he thrusts his knee at my face. His knee sinks into my face. My nasal bone breaks, and I feel his knee drive deeper in. As a reflex, I invoke healing magic.

"Close one...!"

...That was dangerous just now. For a moment, my consciousness was flying away.

"Tch... cocky fucker... hm? Ain't that a nice thing ya had."

The man picks something up off the ground.

...That's the metal mace I just dropped. Oh crap. I immediately protect my head, as the mace swings down onto it. I hear the sound of bone shattering.

"Hey, heyheyhey, how ya like that!? Try an' heal that! Lemme see just how long yer mana will last!"

Again and again, he swings the mace down onto the same spot. I repair my arms with healing magic, but the next attack immediately comes flying in. The pain never ceases.

"Mh, mmph—!"

From behind, I hear a scream. It's Eris' muffled voice.

—I pull my mind together as it's on the verge of surrendering to the pain. Every time I'm hit, I recover my arms with healing magic.

"It ain't over yet!"

Not just my arms; my shoulders, my torso, my legs. With each attack, my consciousness slips further away from the pain. But, so that my head doesn't take a direct hit from the mace, I continue to protect it with both arms.

A pool of blood starts to form at my feet. Perhaps I've been bleeding a considerable amount. I don't even want to imagine how I look from Eris' perspective.

The mace barrage continues. It doesn't let up.

"Gh... fffh..."

After a while, the man returns the mace to his shoulder, out of breath.

...In the end, I have no feeling in the arm that received that last mace hit. When I take a look, from within my arm that's dyed bright red, I can see bone sticking out.

...Is this what's known as an open fracture?

When I notice it, a burning pain runs through my arm.

—But, from behind, I hear Eris frantically trying to tell me something with her wordless voice.

"EX Heal."

—I can still fight. I stand up. And, one more time, I turn to face the man.

However, it doesn't seem that the man was expecting me to stand back up. Seeing me raise my fists once again, he's clearly confused.

...Well, I'm probably the only one whose mana wouldn't run out after healing wounds like these over and over.

"...Y-You... what's going on! H-How are you still standing!"

"...The one thing I take pride in is my healing magic."

I don't know if he heard my answer or not, but the man comes shouting while swinging the mace. Did I throw him off his game? He's swinging even more wildly than before, making it easier to tell where he's aiming. He's targeting my abs. Who cares about my torso. I don't try to evade. Before the mace hits me, I drive my right fist into the man's face.

Right after, the mace hits me dead on, and I hear the sound of several ribs breaking.

"EX Heal."

Blood gradually rises and trickles from my mouth, but the wound is already healed.

I stand once again, and raise my fists.

...Before I noticed it, the man known as Bardas has become unsteady on his feet. Countering like this appears to be working. Besides, even though this guy is a priest he somehow doesn't seem to be able to use healing magic.

"Shit, shit, shiiiiiiiiit!"

The man swings the mace recklessly. Protecting only my head from a direct hit, I plunge my fist into the man's face once more. Then, I treat my injuries. We repeat these exchanges.

...No, this way of doing things is inefficient.

Right, why am I conscientiously waiting until I receive an attack to heal myself?

I cast healing magic. Consecutively, I continue to invoke it.

"EX Heal, EX Heal, EX Heal, EX Heal, EX Heal, EX Heal, EX Heal."

My entire body is enveloped in a soft, green light. Continuing to cast healing magic, I approach the man.

My arm takes a direct hit from the man's mace swing.

—The broken bone immediately mends itself.

The man's kick firmly impacts my torso.

—The pain vanishes in an instant.

"What the... what the hell are youuu! Why, why won't you dieeeee!!"

The man backs away from me with a face that's somehow frightened.

—From behind, I hear Eris moaning. This voice, could she be crying?

If I lose here, Eris' fate will be sealed. I have a reason that I absolutely cannot lose. Stubbornly, I clench my fists.

"S-Shiiit! There's no way I can lose to this guyyyyyyyyyy!"

When I take a step towards the man, he furiously swings the mace. However, in his frenzy, he doesn't put his hips into it.

...If it's like this, my fists should still be superior.

—The man's mace hits me square in the shoulder. However... it's already healed. Unflinchingly, I take another step towards the man.

"How... can this..."

The man looks at me like he can't believe what he's seeing. The mace slips from his hand and crashes to the floor.

—I raise my firmly clenched fist.

I can still count the number of combat experiences I've had so far. In terms of simple strength, this man is likely many times above me. If this were a back alley brawl with nobody else around, I'd run away at full speed.

But, things are different now. Eris is behind me.

Putting all my power behind my fist, I drive it into the man's face. A simple straight right.

...But, for the fatigued and disoriented man, it looks like this fist alone is enough. He's blown straight backwards, and the back of his head slams hard into the stone wall.

Chapter 58: Ceiling

The man's eyes roll back in his head. I've managed to remove the obstacle. All that's left is to escape through that window.

"Okay, Eris, let's get out of here."

I remove Eris' gag and go to untie her restraints.

"H-Hey, are you a-alright?"

When I do, Eris voices her concern, half in tears. I haven't seen her make a face like this very often. It feels kinda fresh.

"A guy like that is no challenge for me. Just a small fry. C'mon, let's escape."

"Y-You were all beat up, weren't you..."

After that, Eris clings to me and sobs out a few words. Ordinarily I'd stay like that and enjoy the soft sensation of her chest, but unfortunately we're not out of the crisis yet. I concentrate on untying Eris' restraints.

"I'm not hurt anymore.

...There we go, the ropes are untied too. We gotta hurry out of here."

I untie the ropes that were binding Eris' arms and legs, and stand her up. The door still seems fine. Now we just have to escape through the window.

"It's hopeless... they're already ahead of us."

Informed by Eris, I look out the window. Just like she said, outside the window there are the silhouettes of a number of priests.

...Was I too slow? I needed to defeat that Bardas guy before we got surrounded from outside.

I see one of the priests raise a mace over his head in order to smash the window. From now on, who knows how many priests are going to come climbing in through that window. Among them, there may be another battle-hardened man like Bardas just now. But unlike Bardas who was just sleeping in

bed, he'd have a weapon from the outset.

Even though one-on-one would be hard enough, if there are more than one of them...

...Is it already hopeless?

No, not yet. If I give up, that will be the end for Eris. I wield my mace. If it comes to that, I'll fight off every last priest by myself.

—The instant I resolve myself, I hear a loud crash.

It's not the sound of the window in front of me shattering. It's a louder, thunderous boom that shakes the entire building.

"—!"

Then, some kind of roar.

"U-Uwaaaaah!"

"E-Ee-Eeeeeek!"

"A d-dragon!? W-Why is there a dragon here!? Eep, d-don't come any closer!!"

Human voices, escaping in a panic. Those are most likely the voices of the archbishop and his priests.

Hold on, a dragon? What the heck is happening...? The moment I try to think about it, accompanied by an incredible noise and impact, one of the walls of the room is blown off. I shield Eris at once.

When I take a look at the wall... there's a dragon's face there. The face of a dragon I remember, jutting through the wall of stone.

"I-Is this okay!? I-It's really okay, right!?"

From the other side of the dragon's face, I hear a familiar voice. It's Ruruka. That's Ruruka's voice.

"Yes, Ruruka-san. Well done. Seeing the unsightly figure of that archbishop fleeing in terror, I am finally satisfied as well."

"T-That's the reason you had me and the dragon crash in!?"

"Indeed. I simply had to repay him in kind, you see."

I remember the voice that's talking with Ruruka, too. But it can't be. I'm certain that Aria told me she was supposed to have returned to the royal capital.

—The dragon gingerly withdraws its head from the wall.

On the other side of the wall, there's Ruruka, and... as I thought, the saint.



"Drop your weapons and surrender!"

When I come out of the room through the newly-opened hole, I notice countless knights rushing into the church. Looking back towards the window, the priests that were outside just now have also been restrained by the knights.

Huh... what kind of development is this? Why is the saint here in this city? Why did the knights come to this church? At the same time these questions arise, one of the knights who entered the church changes their expression and runs over.

...It's Aria. The one who claimed she was returning to the capital with the saint; even she's here.

"O-Onee-chan!? Why are you in a place like this!? D-Don't tell me, the woman abducted by the archbishop, that was you!?"

"Aria..."

Aria takes the hand of Eris who had sunk to the floor and pulls her to her feet. But why are the knights and the saint, not to mention Ruruka and even Aria, showing up at the church with this kind of timing...?

"A-Aria, what in the world is going on? Please explain."

"O-Onii-san!? You look severely injured, are you alright!?"

When I try questioning her, I get questioned instead. Oh yeah, I'm all covered in blood thanks to that man named Bardas. So soaked with blood that it's trickling down the sleeves of my clothes.

"Eh, S-Shiki!? Wait, uwahh, blood!? Is that all blood!?"

Maybe because she heard my voice, Ruruka comes rushing over to me. And, patting her hands all over my body to examine me, she raises a complaint to the saint.

"H-Hey, Saint-sama. What is the meaning of this!? Why is Shiki here!?"

"Come to think of it, he was an acquaintance of yours, wasn't he? My apologies, it slipped my mind."

The saint answer's Ruruka inquiry bluntly without looking at her. Her cold eyes are currently fixed on the archbishop, who has fallen on his rear.

Ruruka and the saint. That combination makes me recall something.

—Purge.

If I recall correctly, Ruruka was saying earlier that the reason the saint came to this city was for a “purge”. By some chance, was that...

The saint speaks while eyeing the violet jewel in the archbishop’s hand.

“That is the one that was previously stolen in a raid by the evil god adherents, the succubus’ jewel. As I thought, you were the one who instigated that. That is quite a perilous item... I shall have you return it.”

...The saint suspected it, huh? The fact that this guy was trying to resurrect an apostle of the evil god. So that’s why it was a purge. From the beginning, the saint’s goal was to purge this archbishop?

“W-Why! Whyyyy! You were supposed to have fled back to the capitaall!”

Still down on his ass, the archbishop directs his rage towards the saint.

“How truly foolish. I was simply waiting for you to do something worthy of being purged. I slipped in amongst the knight brigade’s investigation unit and secretly returned to town, you see.”

...Now that I think about it, Aria was saying that a few days earlier, the lord sent out a large-scale investigation unit over the Krankheit Turtle incident. Apparently, unbeknownst to me, the saint and the archbishop were engaging in an information war.

“Just holding the succubus’ jewel amplifies the owner’s desires. Evil rumors constantly spring up around you. By continuing to observe you, I was certain that you would commit some sort of criminal act... I must say, the results were somewhat beyond my expectations.”

The saint was observing the archbishop? Which means, this situation where the saint stormed into the church is because she had the justification to purge the archbishop, due to him committing the criminal act of abducting Eris? The way she’s speaking kinda sounds like the police arresting a criminal on separate charges.

“Apparently, Saint-sama was convinced that this archbishop was an adherent

of the evil god from the unnatural flow of the donations. But that wasn't definitive enough evidence to mobilize the knight brigade... so that's why she put on this act. I only heard about it myself after we left town, though."

Aria gives us an explanation.

"So that's how it was?"

It seems like everything played out exactly according to the saint's plan. Most likely, what the saint and the lord have been discussing up until now was how to get that archbishop to reveal his faults.

"I never thought that you would come to be connected to this, however. In order to reduce the likelihood that the archbishop would become aware of your existence, I deliberately avoided placing you under observation... in all honesty, when I received the report from Astel, I was struck with terror at the thought that we may not reach you in time."

Keeping her gaze locked on the archbishop, the saint addresses me and Aria. Next to the saint, the beast girl with doglike ears who's around the same age as Yuel is there. I wonder if that kid is Astel? She's contentedly getting her head patted by the saint.

Wait, this isn't the time to be watching that.

...She didn't think that I would be connected? In other words, that means the saint was already well aware of my existence?

"Ah, how terribly impolite of me. I must offer you my gratitude beforehand. I am truly thankful beyond measure for your treatment of the petrification in my stead. Not only the spectators, you also treated one of my subordinates whom I was unable to treat myself."

The saint glances in my direction, and smiles sweetly.

...I guess that means that those "found you" words weren't my misunderstanding after all. It would seem that my healing magic ability had already been discovered.

...But I wonder what she means about preventing the archbishop from

becoming aware of my existence?

As I'm contemplating, I suddenly notice Ruruka looking at me. When our eyes meet, she says "I-I knew it..." and gazes at her own feet, then starts to smile happily for some reason. Then, murmuring "Oh you... oh youuu...!", she lightly jabs me with her elbow.

"Archbishop... no, Evil God Adherent D'arnaud."

The saint turns back to the archbishop. Then, when he's held down by the knights and no longer able to move, she addresses him.

"For the crime of attacking the royal capital's church and pilfering the succubus' jewel. For the crime of abducting a woman and attempting to use her as a sacrifice for the succubus' revival... doubtless there is much more dust to beat out of you, but these alone shall be more than enough to send you to prison. Under my authority as a saint of the Church of Medine, I hereby purge you."

"Guuhhhh..."

Creeping along the ground, the archbishop moans as he glares at the saint. It's a reversal of the earlier scene he was forcing on Eris.

...I suddenly feel anxious and look at Eris, and for some reason she's looking back at me. When our eyes meet, she lowers her head in a fluster.

"Recover the jewel."

In a cold voice, the saint commands the knights.

"N-No way! Absolutely nooot! I finally obtained this jewel after using every means at my disposal to attack the church in the royal capital! I-I'm going to create my ideal world, where the succubus exists!!"

However, the archbishop twists his body despite being held down, resisting with all his might. Scowling at the saint, he somehow shakes off his restraints.

"There is nothing ideal about that world. After a modicum of pleasure, a hopeless reality full of poverty and strife awaits."

...An ideal world where the succubus exists. A world where all of the women become lewd. I too found it fascinating, just a little... no, quite a bit, but...

"...Moreover, and a man like you who thinks of women as nothing but objects for sexual pleasure may not understand this, but for women, that world is merely hell."

Naturally.

...Yes, of course, for women that would be hell, for sure. Please forgive me, I was just enjoying my delusions.

The knights spring into action and seize the archbishop's arms. Then they try to pry the jewel away from him. The knights put enough force against his fingers that are frantically clutching the jewel that it seems like they'll break off. And that instant.

"Sh, shit, shit, shiiiiit!"

Smoke billows forth from the the area where the archbishop is.

"...!"

A smokescreen. The interior of the church fills with smoke.

...Was he keeping a smoke bomb somewhere?

"S-Stop struggling, you asshole!"

The voice of a knight who's trying to restrain him.

"You truly don't know when to give up... Serena, do it."

"Yes... Wind."

One of the saint's escorts, called Serena, uses magic. A wind kicks up and quickly clears away the smoke.

When the smoke clears, the archbishop is still being held down on that spot with no visible differences.

"Fu, fufu... fuha, fuhahaha!"

However, he's laughing. Unlike that desperate expression a moment ago, the

archbishop has a daring smile on his face.

"Never... I'll never hand over the jewel..."

Then, he mutters with an air of madness.

"...! Where is the jewel!? Please find it quickly!"

Looking at the archbishop, the saint apparently realizes something and raises her voice. The knights check the archbishop's body, but... they shake their heads. The calm expression of the saint distorts heavily.

"Y-You couldn't have... you ingested it yourself? I-If you do such a thing..."

"Gu, uuu, uwaaah..."

The archbishop stops laughing, seizes his chest, and begins to moan. His body twists with enough force to throw off the knights restraining him, and he emits a pained voice.

Somehow, his appearance seems unusual. Furthermore, that saint is panicking. He swallowed the jewel? By some chance, does taking that jewel into your body...

"U-Uwaahh!!"

The knights who were restraining the archbishop realize the emergency and jump away.

...A black haze. A black haze gushes forth from every part of the archbishop's body. It covers his entire body, almost as if it's wrapping him up in a cocoon.

"Oh dear, we've been outfoxed... wizards, chant your magic! All hands, please prepare for battle! An apostle of the evil god is reviving!"

—An apostle of the evil god is reviving. At those words, I can feel the tension run through everyone around me.

At the same time, the black cocoon in front of me begins to transform. It repeatedly expands and contracts as if digesting the existence within it as it morphs. After that, the cocoon shrinks, gradually beginning to form into a humanoid shape.

Then, the form becomes female. That's the succubus, an apostle of the evil

god.

...T-That's the succubus?

"W-What's with thiis!?"

As tension spreads throughout the church, the woman... no, the girl, raises a shrill voice.

...I-Is that really supposed to be the succubus?

"W-What happened! The vessel was a m-maan!? And his mana was mostly fake!"

Patting her hands over her own body, the succubus cries out.

Long, pink hair. Soft-looking brown skin. Large, demonic wings. Red, brilliantly shining pupils.

Everything up to that point is certainly succubus-like.

But... she's small.

Her height isn't much taller than Yuel's, and besides, more than anything...

"M-My, my breasts are gone!! W-Where are they!? Where did my breasts go!?"

...She has no tits. Patting her flat chest, the succubus throws a tantrum.

...Oh yeah, the archbishop was saying something about a woman with enough mana to use EX Heal being necessary in order to completely revive the succubus. The archbishop was not a woman. Moreover, his mana was inflated by all those magic tool rings jangling around on his hands. His original mana capacity likely wasn't anything special.

"T-They were my pride and joy... my praiseworthy breasts..."

That must be the result of an incomplete revival. The illustration of the succubus drawn in the Bible had a more glamorous figure. In that respect it was exactly like Eris'. The current succubus... I could easily call it a child's figure.

"W-Why... whyyy..."

As for the succubus, those seemed to be considerably important; she's fallen into panic. She's not paying attention to her surroundings one bit, just checking her own body over and over in that atmosphere. Her face is half in tears.

"Offensive magic, fire."

The saint raises an audibly ruthless voice.

While I'm still speculating, the knights and the saint's escorts finish their chants. Fire bombs, lightning, and balls of ice fly towards the succubus, who only recently revived.

"...! Eek, h-hot! C-Cold, s-s-stoooooop!"

Screaming out, the succubus spreads the wings on her back and dodges the concentrated fire of magic.

...She kinda doesn't seem that strong. After she was called an apostle of the evil god, it's a bit disappointing. Although with how she's dodging the magic in every direction, her only strength seems to be in running away.

"Show no mercy! She positively must be brought down here!"

The saint's order flies out. Aimed at the succubus flying around inside the church, even more magic shoots out.

"Higiii!"

Ah, the dragon just hit her with its tail and smacked her against the wall. However, although she's getting battered, the succubus immediately resumes her escape. I can see tears spilling from her eyes.

"F-Foul humans! ...Hey, this is a church! Foul humans, from the accursed church that sealed Evil God-sama!"

The child-size succubus is saying something in her shrill voice, but it has no impact at all. Screeching the occasional "It's hot" or "It's cold" complaint, she's just buzzing around like a gnat.

...I-Is that really the same succubus that was written about in the Bible?

However, doesn't that mean she's had a lot of combat experience as an apostle of the evil god? The succubus manages to slip through the rain of magic as she hovers around the ceiling where the stained glass has already broken off. Although her hair is considerably burnt, and chunks of ice are clinging to her legs.

The dragon pursues her close behind,
"Kuh... how's this!"

but the succubus' pupils shine red, and in the next moment the dragon's movements stiffen a little. And the succubus continues to stare at the dragon.

"G-Guuhh, a dragon is impossible after all, huh..."

However, she seems to give up quickly, and stops looking at the dragon.

"I-I won't forgive this! I absolutely won't forgive you jerks! A city like this, I'll crush it in no time with my monster army! J-Just you wait and see!"

After that, in tears, the succubus flees into the sky. She quickly melts into the dark of night, and can no longer be seen.

"So she eluded us..."

The saint mutters with a shameful face.

"I gotta say, she felt kinda underwhelming..."

How do I put this, at the very least she didn't feel like an apostle of the evil god. Calling

that

a threat to humanity doesn't seem fitting at all.

"Do not be deceived by appearances. Her resurrection appears to be incomplete, but that is unmistakably the succubus, an apostle of the evil god. According to the materials left in the church, at times she would periodically assimilate herself within human society, and at other times she would lead a host of tens of thousands of monsters and lay waste to numerous countries."

The saint advises me with chagrin.

"T-Tens of thousands!?"

Tens of thousands. Did she just say that the succubus controls tens of thousands of monsters? Sure, it was written in the bible that she manipulates monsters' desires and controls them as an army and stuff, but... t-that many of them?

"The succubus is not the type of apostle that engages in combat directly. One must be wary not of her fighting strength, but her special ability to manipulate desires. It would have been ideal to bring her down here, but..."

Furthermore, she declared that she will make an attack on this city. It will be essential for us to prepare countermeasures posthaste."

The number of knights in this city is perhaps not even a thousand. Despite that, tens of thousands of monsters are apparently going to attack us. I was deceived by the childlike form, but seems like that's really an apostle of the evil god. This is starting to feel dangerous.

"H-Hey, Shiki. This may not be the right time to ask you this, but... come to think of it, that Aria girl was calling you Onii-chan earlier, huh... what... what does that mean...?"

Completely falling for Aria's trick, Ruruka asks me timidly. But this really isn't the time to be having a conversation like that. An army of monsters is supposedly going to come attack us, so we should really run away immediately.

—Suddenly, there's the sound of the glass window breaking.

"Eeep!"

Along with that sound, with incredible force, something comes plunging into the church. That was fast. Way too fast. Did the succubus come back with monsters already...?

Or so I thought, but nope.

Something busts through the window and slides to a stop along the ground. A short body. Silver hair. It's Yuel. Yuel just dove through the window. After that, she quickly surveys her surroundings, finds me, and rushes over.

"M-Masterrr!"

"Yuel, w-why are you here!?"

Yuel makes a beeline to me, then looks up at me with a tearful face.

"When I woke up, Master was gone, the front door was open, and I was so worried that something happened! I heard a huge sound from the church, so I thought for sure that you would be here!"

Yuel explains in a quivering voice. It would seem she's been desperately searching for me. I must have ended up making her worry. Actually, speaking of worries...

"I-I'm not injured, okay. I'm fine, Yuel, don't worry!"

I'm covered in blood. It's not like she won't worry just because I tell her not to, but for the time being I let her know that I'm unhurt.

"Master, I'm sorry... I couldn't be by your side, I'm sorry..."

When I do, Yuel clings to me with no regard for getting covered in blood herself. After that, she starts sniffling and begins to cry.

...After Eris was abducted, I myself disappeared without a trace, not leaving behind a single clue. Yuel too must have been in a cold sweat this whole time, scouring the city in that kind of mental state.

I pet Yuel's head. At the same time, I hear a voice from the saint's direction.

"A-Ahh! That girl! That's the girl, Philine-sama! When I was trying to observe the archbishop at the orphanage, she's the one who chased me all of a sudden!"

When I glance over, the young beast girl who was getting her head patted by the saint not too long ago is there. Her name was Astel, I think? Her fluffy, light brown hair is disheveled, and she's pointing at Yuel.

...Yuel chased her at the orphanage? Oh yeah, I'm pretty sure she was saying something about a beast girl being on top of the roof so she ran after her. Yuel-san, did you chase away the surveillance that the saint placed on the archbishop? Well, sneaking around near me, she might have thought that it was some suspicious fellow.

Yuel doesn't even seem to be listening to that voice; she's just clinging tightly

to me like she's trying to ascertain my warmth, continuing to cry. Now that I get a closer look, her body is covered in wounds. She's barefoot, and blood is oozing from her feet. She was likely in a great hurry to search for me. I cast healing magic on Yuel, then pet her head again.

The Astel or whatever girl gives Yuel an intense glare as she vents her accusation.

"Philine-sama, hey, Philine-sama! That's the girl! It's that girl!"

"Astel, be silent a moment."

However, the saint rebukes her, making an expression like she's deep in thought. Astel does as she's told and says no more, ears drooping as she hangs her head.

The saint continues to stare at the hole in the ceiling through which the succubus left.

"Remaining here forever will solve nothing. For the time being, shall we consider what to do henceforth at Lord-sama's mansion?"

The saint mutters that, then for some reason looks at me and smiles sweetly.

Chapter 59: Countermeasure Meeting

We're in a room in the lord's mansion. After changing out of my bloodstained clothes, I headed right here as informed, and now we're about to conduct a meeting to discuss countermeasures against the raid that the succubus announced.

I entered the room and took a seat several minutes ago. At present, the meeting is just starting.

"Well then, let us begin."

The one chairing the meeting is the saint. After a straightforward recap of the archbishop's revival of the succubus, she gets to the main topic.

"...Accordingly, the succubus most likely intends to spend a few days roaming the areas surrounding this city before returning to attack, accompanied by every last monster that lives in the vicinity. We must formulate urgent countermeasures."

"Mmm."

The lord nods at the saint's words. It seems like she's already discussed the general situation with him.

By the way, the moment I entered this conference room, the lord said something about "I knew my eyes didn't deceive me" while slapping my shoulders merrily. He was referring to my healing magic ability, and the fact that I was most likely the perpetrator of the city-wide Area Heal, which he had already heard about from the saint. I thought I had concealed it, but apparently the saint was already aware.

Well, that's the reason why I'm seated here at this meeting as if I'm some VIP, though.

"There is one thing I want to ask; is it true that the succubus' ability is to manipulate the desires of the creatures around her?"

The attendees are the middle-aged leader of the knights (who just spoke), the saint, the lord, and me. Also Ruruka, for some reason. The five of us are seated

around a table in the conference room. Ruruka must be nervous being around so many big names, though; she keeps glancing over at me like she can't calm down.

In addition, there are others in the room such as the saint's escorts, some subordinates of the leader of the knights, Fran, and Yuel, but they're standing back behind their respective participants. I didn't think the number of critical participants would be this small, but perhaps they're against making the meeting chaotic by raising the number of participants.

"Yes, exactly right. In addition to that, according to materials from the Holy Demon War period, targeted creatures are less susceptible to the effect in proportion to their reason and intellect. Considering that the succubus used magic of some sort on the dragon yet it manifested little effect, this is most likely true."

I wonder if the Holy Demon War is referring to the past war with the evil god that was written about in the Bible?

...Hold on, that's when the succubus made her eyes glow red. Was she controlling the dragon's sexual desires? It was mentioned in the Bible that the succubus uses her ability to manipulate sexual desires to create an army of monsters, but when the dragon received that, all that happened was that its movements became slightly dull. That must mean her ability is ineffective on those monsters with reason and high intellect.

"Therefore, there should be no problem with considering humans or highly-intelligent creatures such as dragons to be excluded from the enemy's war potential."

The saint continues, making a declaration. Hearing that is a relief. Looks like the succubus won't be forcing any knight brigade members to betray us or spearheading a legion of dragons. If she could turn friends into foes or create an army of dragons, we'd have no chance of winning no matter how much healing magic I fired off.

"What would you say is your approximation of the enemy's war potential?"

"From past accounts, the succubus has the power to manipulate tens of thousands of monsters, but..."

The saint responds to the lord's inquiry.

...Tens of thousands. I can't picture it from the words, but in the worst case, that's more than a hundred times the number of knights in this city. A hundredfold difference in war potential means that in the worst case, each knight will be thrown into a swarm of a hundred monsters and be defeated with no hope of coming back alive. It seems like there's nothing that Yuel-san can't handle when she tries, but demanding that from every member of the knights would be cruel. Ordinarily, that would mean death.

"Tens of thousands, huh..."

The lord groans. I can feel the air in the conference room grow tense from those words. However, in order to quash that atmosphere, the leader of the knights rebuts.

"...That could vary widely depending on how far away the succubus goes to gather monsters, but at the very least, she shouldn't be able to assemble an army of tens of thousands of monsters right away. You can't find that number of monsters in this area in the first place."

...That reminds me, one of the jobs of the knight brigade is to clean up the monsters outside the city. Perhaps they have a general understanding of how many monsters there are in this region.

"But, if she really does have the ability to control tens of thousands of monsters, she should be able to assemble a host of monsters in a few days that would easily exceed the number of knights in this city. With the flying speed she showed at the church... we ought to account for somewhere around 6000 monsters within four days, or 9000 within a week."

The leader of the knights continues, amending his statement. So that means that in this region, there are enough monsters that the succubus would be able to assemble 6000 over 4 days of roaming around and 9000 over 6 days? That's considerably lower compared to tens of thousands.

"Mm, mmm..."

The lord groans again at the knight leader's estimates.

...Well, it may be lower, but even so that's a tenfold difference in war potential. Something tells me that even with my Area Heal, there's still the possibility that we'll be overwhelmed by sheer numbers. My magic is purely healing magic, not resurrection magic. If there's such a difference in numbers that the knights are likely to be killed immediately, no matter how much I continuously cast Area Heal on the knight brigade, there will be casualties. Depending on the strength of the enemy monsters, it's possible that the knight brigade will gradually be whittled down and face defeat.

"In the end, if it comes to a tenfold difference in war potential, the knight brigade will inevitably be dealt a blow to the degree of annihilation. The first thing I'd like to do is request reinforcements from the surrounding cities... Lord-sama, would that be acceptable?"

The leader of the knights makes a proposal to the lord.

Reinforcements. Well, I guess that's the conclusion he'd reach. If we increase our number of allies, the difference in war potential will be lower. The knights are few in number, but they're elite. If it's reduced from 1 vs. 10 monsters to 1 vs. 3, I don't think they'll die that quickly. And there's my healing magic too, so I get the feeling we can repel them with that level of disparity in war potential.

"Reinforcements, huh..."

However, when the lord hears the word 'reinforcements', he sighs.

"Lord-sama, is there a problem with that?"

The leader of the knights raises a questioning voice.

"...The succubus, who has destroyed countless cities in the past, comes leading an army of monsters. In a war where victory is not assured, it would be great if there were lords with the courage to lend out their precious knight brigades, but..."

"...Precisely because there is a risk, they may be reluctant to send out reinforcements, is that what you mean?"

The lord nods with a bitter expression in response to the knight leader's query.

...I've heard that lately, there's hardly any war between fellow humans. I wonder if part of it is that they're hesitant about that possibility?

"The royal capital, at least, would assuredly send out reinforcements. But as for the regional cities, they ordinarily don't maintain much of a surplus in war potential. If the reinforcements they sent out were to be eliminated, it would pose a huge impediment to the future operation of the city. It is difficult to say this, but precisely because this is such a crisis-level situation, the lords governing the regional cities would be motivated to harden their own defenses and wait for relief from the royal capital."

Meaning that in a war where you don't know if you'll win or lose, there's no way you'll dispatch your important knight brigade? Well, unable to oppose the threat of monsters without the knight brigade, public order in the city would take a turn for the worse as well. Looking at it from the perspective of a lord, the knights are certainly an existence that they absolutely cannot afford to lose.

"In other words... the prospects of reinforcements from anywhere but the royal capital are slim."

"Frankly, that is the case. Which is not to say that none will come at all, but we cannot expect much."

The leader of the knights and the lord both make a grim expression.

"I wonder if we might offer conciliations to the other lords? The current matter is our blunder as the church. In terms of money, I would like to offer as much assistance as I can."

In the middle of that, the saint speaks of conciliations.

"As far as the city lords are concerned, the elites of the knight brigade are vital for the continued development of their cities. They cannot be replenished quickly, either. For monetary recompense alone, they would only participate opportunistically as reinforcements if victory seems assured."

Sounds hopeless.

By the way, I haven't said a single thing so far.

...Honestly, why am I seated here? The saint offered me a chair when I entered the room, but I don't know all that much about military affairs in general, let alone the fine details.

"...I must say, how unpleasant. Even by dragon it will take two days to reach the royal capital. If reinforcements are dispatched after that, it would not be unusual for them to take more than ten days to arrive."

Ah, now I finally understand the reason Ruruka is here. The flying speed of a dragon is most likely faster than a horse running along the ground. And the dragon seems attached to Ruruka, so they intend to use her as a communication method to call for reinforcements?

"It is believed that the succubus will come to attack this city within a week at the latest. In the materials from the Holy Demon War, there were similar descriptions. The succubus' ability can create an army, but simply being able to manipulate monsters' desires does not mean she maintains complete control over them. It seems that after an extended period of time, she will lose control over the army."

"One week... in the first place, reinforcements from the capital won't make it in time."

"Yes."

The conversation between the saint and the lord continues, but the situation looks fairly bad. I can feel a gloomy atmosphere filling the room.

But it's not an atmosphere of "In that case let's turn tail and swiftly run away to the royal capital!". Let me suggest a different approach.

"If knights alone aren't enough, what if we add adventurers to the war potential?"

"Adventurers are numerous, but many of them would have their ability pushed to its limits simply hunting low-grade monsters. Without a certain level of combat ability, they would be unable to maintain the battle lines and only serve to drag us down. They would just add to the number of corpses."

Of course. Well, I wouldn't want weak guys joining me in the line of battle either. So long as they have enough skill to avoid instant death they won't die

that quickly thanks to my healing magic, but without that they really would just die like cannon fodder.

Doesn't look like adventurers like Eight and Geyser who hang around on the lower floors of the labyrinth will get their turn.

Then, the conference room grows silent.

The lord groans as he hangs his head. The leader of the knights crosses his arms and closes his eyes in contemplation. Only the saint is... for some reason, looking at me.

This gaze is likely not the “that guy’s black hair sure is beautiful...” kind of gaze. Well, I more or less understand.

...The truth is, I too have come up with a method to call for reinforcements, just one. I don’t really want to bring it up, though.

If it’s me, perhaps I can persuade the lords of other cities not to be so stingy with reinforcements. It’s quite simple, as well.

...But if I do that, I will certainly stand out. And if I’m conspicuous, the number of unnecessary risks like the time with the archbishop will increase.

Guys who’d want to make use of my massive power can be found anywhere. Eris was targeted this time due to a misunderstanding, but if my ability comes to light, I’ll be targeted directly next time. Yuel may be able to protect me if it’s on the level of mere thugs, but naturally there are times when Yuel isn’t at my side.

I suddenly get concerned, and glance over in Yuel’s direction.

—My eyes meet hers.

Yuel is simply staring at me. The forecast from the meeting is doubtful, but I don’t feel any anxiety regarding that in Yuel’s eyes. She’s just looking at me with the same unchanging pupils as usual. They’re telling me that she doesn’t feel threatened at all by the fact that a large quantity of monsters will be attacking.

Most likely, Yuel believes that we'll definitely win.

Why does she have so much faith? Because she knows the extent of the knights' abilities? Because she thinks we'll pull through in the event of a defensive battle in a siege on the walls? I can come up with plenty of ideas, but after all, the definitive one would have to be...

—because I'm here.

Yuel knows my ability better than anyone. So long as we have my healing magic we can repel an army of monsters, that's most likely what she's thinking.

Sure, that's definitely possible. With my healing magic, even if we don't call for reinforcements, maybe we could repel them with just the members of this city's knight brigade.

...But, just like the leader of the knights said, if we did that the knight brigade of this city would receive a blow on the level of annihilation. People are fragile. Smash their heads and they'll easily die. If the elite members of the knight brigade can demonstrate their true ability then they shouldn't receive fatal injuries so quickly, but if they get surrounded by superior numbers then they won't be able to.

...In the end, reinforcements are necessary.

I stop looking at Yuel, and glance towards the saint.

As for *her*

pupils, it's as if they can see right through me. To the method that I came up with. The saint had probably thought of it too, a long time ago.

As for what I really think, I want to abandon the city and run away. I don't wanna stand out one bit.

But, my healing magic ability has already been discovered by many people. It's just a matter of time for it to spread. Even if I don't make this proposal, eventually a large number of people will come to know the truth about my healing magic ability.

...This may be the necessary time for a policy change. In order to protect my

own body, rather than hiding my ability, I'll use my healing magic to create loans. That way of thinking should also be acceptable.

Besides, this proposal is sure to garner a look of respect from Yuel; it's something her master would propose. Not just the members of the knight brigade, but most likely a large number of lives will be saved; that kind of proposal.

"Hey, Saint-sama."

"Fufu, please call me Philine."

When I call out to the saint, she makes a delighted smile.

...Looks like she already knows what I'm planning to say.

Besides, this reaction. It feels like she was evaluating me based on whether or not I would say it myself. It kinda doesn't feel great to be strung along for the ride, but there most likely isn't any other method outside of this one.

"Alright, Philine. As far as methods to call for reinforcements go, I have an idea. It presumes that Philine will be cooperating with me, though."

Once again, I address the saint. When I do, the saint respectfully bows her head.

"Yes. Shiki-sama, if there's anything that I can do, whatever it may be, please give me your orders."

Then she says that to me.

Chapter 60: Defensive Battle

Five days have passed since the meeting, and it's around noon. A report arrives from the knights that "a large-scale swarm of monsters is approaching the city".

"So she has finally come."

Putting down the fork in her hand, the saint mutters. We're in the dining hall of the lord's mansion. Everyone who's staying at the lord's mansion had just sat down to have a meal.

"...Looks like it."

It took her a long time. In these five days, I've just been killing time at the lord's mansion. I'd already done everything I could do in advance by sending requests to the nearby cities for reinforcements.

Since we didn't know when the succubus might attack, I haven't left the lord's mansion, which seems to have become our strategic headquarters. It's not like I can recklessly take peeks at Eris' breasts with all this attention on me either. And Ruruka has already left to call for reinforcements from the royal capital.

I've just been waiting for the succubus to come, with nothing at all to do.

Since that meeting, with nothing but time on my hands, I've just been earnestly petting Yuel's head.

"Master, this time for sure, I will protect you!"

I pat Yuel's eager head lightly.

...Yuel has been bothered by the fact that I was severely injured at the church while she was sleeping. To the extent that she has already begun guarding me throughout the night without sleep. She blames herself for not being able to do anything when her master was in trouble.

That's why I'm petting her.

Even when the saint looked at me with a profound smile, I petted Yuel.

Even when Eris' chest button popped off, I petted Yuel.

Even when the lord proposed a marriage to Fran, I petted Yuel while politely declining.

Perhaps because of that, Yuel, who was feeling down, is now giving off the feeling that she's trying to face forward and make up for her failure.

"Well then, Shiki-sama, let us make haste toward the ramparts."

"Yeah."

From the knights' report, the surroundings are in an uproar. They've been sending out scouts, so the succubus' forces shouldn't reach the city right away, but it's not like we have time to waste either.

We leave the lord's mansion in a hurry, aiming for the city's ramparts.

...In the meantime, I haven't just been petting Yuel's head; we've also been discussing our assumptions for the battle with the succubus.

The succubus' forces, and how she fights. We've had countless meetings with the saint as the core, since she's the one with the deepest knowledge concerning that apostle of the evil god.

The crux of the battle is... me. In order to make the best use of my healing magic, I'll be stationed in this stronghold on top of the city's ramparts to get a clear view, with the knight brigade arrayed right in front of the gates below. That's apparently the formation we're going with.

I wondered if the knight brigade might not be too far away for me to cast healing magic on them, but the saint said she had just the magic tool to cover that. And when the monster forces collide with the knight brigade head-on, I'll heal them from atop the walls using that magic tool.

In the case that the succubus brings more monsters with her than anticipated, the knight brigade will immediately return to the city for a siege. While we engage in a defensive battle from the ramparts, we'll wait for reinforcements from the royal capital.

That's the strategy. Fortifying a completely defensive position, the saint will

presumably issue suitable orders for everyone.

"Oh yeah, what about that magic tool you mentioned earlier that lets your magic fly further?"

On the way over, I try asking the saint. Fundamentally, healing magic can't be invoked if the target isn't close. From atop the walls, it generally wouldn't be possible for healing magic to reach the knight brigade dozens of meters away. Many healers would be watering at the mouth for a magic tool that can extend the reach of magic. I'm a little interested in what type of item it is.

"I have brought it with me. However, it is quite conspicuous, so I shall hand it over after we finish moving..."

Giving me a smile, the saint puts on airs. Well, if it happened to break while we were en route, the strategy would fail right then and there. I guess it can't be helped.

—In that manner, I climb the ramparts along with the saint, Yuel, and the other assorted escort knights.

Down below, I can see a large number of monsters approaching along the plains that spread out in front of the city. In the skies above that swarm of monsters, there's a single black silhouette. It's the succubus. The succubus is guiding the swarm of monsters from above, almost like the light from a bug zapper.

There's still a fair amount of distance between us. Although they've come within eyesight of the city, at that rate it should still take them some time.

"She appears to be pointing at us and laughing her head off, does she not?"

The saint peers at the succubus through the telescope-like object she's holding in one hand. I borrow it to take a look, and yeah, it does feel like that. She's holding her waist with both hands and laughing idiotically with her head tilted back.

She seems to be confident in her victory. Well, I did hear that the succubus has formerly destroyed countless cities. Most likely, she has a general understanding of the war potential of this city as well as how much war potential it would take to win.

"Their numbers are around 3000, or thereabouts? Kobolds, Goblins, Forest Wolves... she really did bring anything in this area that she could get her hands on. That number is fewer than anticipated, though."

3000, huh? I'm sure that at the church, they were saying 6000 in 4 days. 3000 in 5 days is lower than half of our estimate. Certainly, that's considerably fewer than we anticipated.

"Maybe because her revival was incomplete, it takes her more time to manipulate monsters?"

"That may be."

From what I heard at the lord's mansion, the number of knights that the city can mobilize in its present condition is approximately 500. The enemy has roughly 6 times that number.

Whether we'll win or lose is complicated, but at the very least if we fight head-on, the knight brigade is bound to incur heavy losses. I get the feeling I've figured out the reason why the succubus is laughing so hard. If the number of knight brigade members is reduced, they can't be immediately replaced, but for the succubus it'd be just fine to go bring more monsters from some other place. With two or three attacks of this scale, it wouldn't be unusual for this city to fall.

And the knight brigade was on standby inside the city so they haven't completely finished deploying yet either. The succubus... it's inevitable that she'd make a mistake in her reading of the situation.

"Such an incredible number..."

Seeing the monster forces, Eris mumbles anxiously. I told her she didn't have to come this far, but she said she didn't want to wait for me and came along. As I thought, Eris seems to be against waiting for someone to return. Well, monsters shouldn't make it as far as this stronghold, though, so I don't really mind.

"Worry not, Eris. With these numbers, we can win.
...And reinforcements are coming, too."

At the same time I reassure Eris,

"Crusell knight brigade, 300 troops, deployment complete."

a report comes up to the saint. It's from a knight wearing armor with a slightly different appearance from the one of this city's knight brigade. After that, a number of reports come up in succession.

"Arias knight brigade, 200 troops, deployment complete."

"Lumiere knight brigade, 500 troops, deployment complete."

"Latoa knight brigade, 300 troops, deployment complete."

The reports continue further. Again and again, the reports continue to arrive. Looks like the knight brigade deployments are finally complete. I take a look below the ramparts, and a great number of knights are in formation there.

That number is... 5000.

—Calling for reinforcements was a success. Which is to say, from all of the cities close enough to dispatch soldiers within 5 days, the majority of the forces have assembled here.

"Such a magnificent view. This is also thanks to Shiki-sama's proposal."

The saint smiles at me.

...The reason that the lords of the other cities were hesitant to send out reinforcements. It was the risk that their knight brigades would be annihilated.

If they sent out their knight brigade as reinforcements and it ended up being wiped out, that would pose an obstacle to the future operation of their city. Furthermore, the opponent is an apostle of the evil god, the succubus. An existence that destroyed countless cities in the past. Since reinforcements will come from the royal capital anyhow, abandoning this Merhatz and fortifying their own city's defenses would be an extremely rational choice for the lords who manage those cities.

...But I knew. For a powerful person, especially a person such as the lord of a city, my healing magic is something they would want to get their hands on by any means necessary.

Just by saying "I will reveal my own ability", I can overturn the lords' judgment. Because for the lords of this region, making an ally of me is worth the

huge risk they would have to take.

—In this world, “illness” is seen as considerably serious.

I’ve had plenty of material to consider so far.

For example, the purchasing price for a Slime Drop, a drop from the Huge Slime on a low level of the labyrinth, was high enough to be called abnormal. That was because a regional lord was purchasing it from the guild as an ingredient for a medicine to treat an endemic disease.

Another example, the derelict old town where people no longer live. For the mere reason that it didn’t get enough sunlight and health problems were likely to occur, the entire neighborhood was completely abandoned.

And, in the Krankheit Turtle incident, that state of panic among the citizens. Many citizens stormed the hospitals, and the treatment wasn’t progressing at all.

In this world where monsters abound, what will happen if sickness runs rampant within a city? Even for people who haven’t fallen ill yet, they can’t simply escape outside the city. As the sickness continues to spread within the city, it will become a huge disaster. If treatment falls behind like at the time of the Krankheit Turtle incident, disputes will occur over the distribution of medicines and healers. It will turn into the worst situation. At that point, it will become impossible to manage an independent city.

As the lord of a city, every one of them should understand that.

That’s why I made the proposal at that meeting, to offer the other lords the deal that “if you send reinforcements, whenever a disease flourishes within your city, I will treat the entire city and put a stop to it”.

Ordinarily, even if I made a proposal like this, they wouldn’t possibly believe me. There shouldn’t be any healer capable of treating an entire city. They would respond like that, and that would be the end of it.

But now it’s different.

That maximum Area Heal during the Krankheit Turtle incident. That was referred to as a miracle from god, and even became the cause for the city

festival to become so lively.

At this point everybody knows that a real “miracle” occurred in this city. After that, all that Saint-sama from the church had to do was drop a few lines. That there was a person in this city who was behind the “miracle from god”.

“...I never expected it to turn out like this.”

That Area Heal, the one I used to comfort Yuel when she was depressed over our bracelets shattering. I never thought that it would become the key to calling for reinforcements. Moreover, with that max Area Heal, I can reduce the knights’ losses. That made it easier for the lords of other cities to send reinforcements, too.

Well, we did assemble more troops than I was expecting, though.

Knights: 5000. Monsters: 3000. In terms of numbers, that’s already overwhelming. That’s easily enough war potential to ensure certain victory even without my healing magic. Knights are powerful. If we’re winning by numbers, there’s no way we should lose against this mishmash of hastily-assembled monsters.

Taking a look towards the succubus, her army that was heading this way is coming to a halt.

As I thought, she must not have expected so many reinforcements to be here. Well, I’m pretty sure the Bible mentioned that when she crushed towns one by one in the past, there was ongoing conflict between fellow humans, though. If I had to put it in words, she was just waiting on the sidelines to nab the prize after they weakened each other. She might not have been thinking that a single city could assemble this many troops.

“She seems somewhat irritated, does she not?”

The saint comments as she observes the Succubus through her telescope-like device. I borrow it again, and yeah, it does look that way. Her face is bright red and her eyes look a little watery, as she shouts something at us. Maybe it’s something like “Calling for reinforcements, you cowards!”.

But without my healing magic, no matter how even the numbers, we’d still incur a certain amount of losses. Perhaps knowing that, the succubus once

again resumes her advance towards us. Well, losing knights would be a serious blow to us, but for the other side she only threw together a suitable number of monsters. In the end, she may be thinking that even if she doesn't win, it's good enough to deal a certain level of damage to us and come back with more monsters later.

As far as I can tell from the succubus' face, I can only see a look of complete desperation forming, though.

...Most likely, as the saint mentioned at the meeting, there's a connection to her not being able to subdue monsters for an extended period of time.

Man, there's a limit to how foolish a plan can be. The succubus won't even be able to deal any damage to the knight brigades.

...So far, I've entered the labyrinth by myself, and fought formidable enemies such as the Armor Ogre and Bardas one-on-one. And every time, I got the crap beaten out of me. But the reason I didn't die is because I was able to heal my own injuries.

But my way of fighting up until now wasn't making the optimal use out of my healing magic. Fighting directly isn't a healer's role. A healer's job is to provide support from behind.

I look at the knights in formation below.

Large army vs large army. Furthermore, the ability of my allies is overwhelmingly higher. And they have me supporting them.

In exactly a situation like this, I can exhibit the true worth of my healing magic.

"Shiki-sama, by all means, please use this equipment."

At the same time the succubus presses onwards, the saint hands something over to me.

"...This is, a cane?"

"Yes. It is a venerable item handed down through the church. Not only does it allow one to cast magic from a distance, it also enables one to use higher

degrees of magic."

Kinda sounds like an amazing cane. The extravagant decorations do make it look expensive, yet it also appears to have seen many years of use. But it seems to have been carefully maintained; even though it's full of scratches, it doesn't look worn-out. It's as if it was brought out from a museum exhibit or something, that's the kind of atmosphere it has.

...I try using Appraisal.

Magic Tool

Properties: Mana Capacity Up, Mana Amplification, Casting Range Expansion, Effect Range Expansion, Magic Effect Up, Mana Absorption - User - Persistent

Somehow, there are various effects attached to it that I've never seen before. If I recall correctly, even a ring that only raises mana capacity costs around 10 million Zeni, though. This cane, how many millions of Zeni would an item like this be worth?

"S-Something like this, is it really okay for me to use it?"

"Yes, this cane cannot be handled without an enormous amount of mana, after all. With your aptitude, Shiki-sama, I would like for you to use it by all means."

The saint says with a radiant smile. Apparently it's okay for me to use it. Well, that was the plan from the beginning, though.

...But man, this cane, I get the feeling I've seen it before somewhere. Although I have no interest in canes, so I shouldn't have had that many opportunities to see it.

Well, whatever. I hold the cane lent by the saint in my hand. Then, gazing at the succubus' army, I hold it aloft.

"M-Master... Master is... amazing, amazing!"

When I do, Yuel who was waiting by my side stares at me with a look of reverence for some reason and begins to shower me with praise. What's going on? I haven't even used any healing magic yet.

...Hold on, something tells me that this look of reverence from Yuel is

different from normal. Usually she's sending me a look of respect because she feels happy about my actions, that kind of feeling, but this time the look feels somehow distant. Like she's realized something incredible, surprise mixed with admiration.

"...! S-So that's what it was..."

Seeing Yuel's reaction, Eris seems to realize something too. She's looking at me with a face like she's somehow become convinced.

But well, I have no time to worry about that right now. Very soon, the knights and the monsters will collide. I mustn't misjudge my timing to cast healing magic.

...However, right before the monsters clash with the knights. The succubus comes out in front of the monster army, at a distance where our attack magic may or may not reach, and shouts.

"You may have the numbers, but your victory isn't decided yet!"

Attack magic just barely won't reach. Maybe the dragon could attack her, but Ruruka and the dragon haven't returned yet. Just to be sure, they went to the royal capital to call for reinforcements. If Ruruka and the dragon are going ahead of the reinforcements, in terms of days they should be coming back around today, though.

"Foolish humans, who sealed Evil God-sama! You bastards, how many of your corpses will rot on this soil? Watch and see!"

The succubus is stubborn but she doesn't declare "I will win", most likely because she realizes herself that she can't win.

Even so, she doesn't make a temporary retreat to assemble more monsters, probably due to the weakness of her ability to manipulate desire. From the fact that she couldn't manipulate the dragon, it's not a perfect brainwashing type of ability. Besides, while their sexual desires still exceed their other desires they'll remain focused on the succubus and she can influence them, but no matter how much she fans up their sexual desires, when they get hungry enough they should switch their target to the meat in front of them instead of her. Most likely, after the monsters are gathered for a while, they'll no doubt start to

cannibalize each other.

And the saint was also saying something like if she's manipulating them for too long, they'll break free from her control.

Moreover, there aren't any airborne monsters either. This too is most likely because the succubus is using herself as bait to lead the monsters. If she tempts monsters that can fly, she'll likely end up being caught by them.

—As I'm speculating, I see the wide formation of knights intercept the monsters' attacks. The battle has begun. Time to get to work.

Raising the cane, I recite the incantation.

"Area Heal."

I sense the gathered mana become amplified. From the cane, I feel more than my full power being drawn out. When I invoke the magic, in a single shot its light envelops every last knight.

The knights maintain their ranks, advancing over the monsters' corpses. Each time the knights thrust their spears, a large number of monsters simultaneously fall the ground. However, no matter how much the monsters attack, no knight corpses are produced. In cooperation, the knights cover each other, and they steadily reduce the monsters' numbers. Then for the second time, I set off healing magic there. In the distance, I can see the wounded knights promptly return to the front lines.

"This is an incredible cane."

After using it, I understood... this cane is incredible.

It doesn't just let me cast magic at a distance. Just as I expected, it also lets me precisely specify the maximum extent of my Area Heal. Moreover, that maximum extent itself is expanded. Furthermore, even though the light of my healing magic was that of a mere Heal, it shined as bright as the average High Heal. Most likely, it had the corresponding effect. Just holding the cane gives me the sensation that my mana is being sucked away, but for me the impact is negligible.

"Yes. Among the magic tools possessed by the church, this is the highest-class

item, after all."

As I listen to the saint's voice, I continuously fire off healing magic.

This is already a total victory. The monsters the succubus brought with her are all small fry. Mostly low-grade monsters that the knights can cut down in a single stroke. I wonder if this is a result of the succubus' incomplete resurrection as well? In a small amount of time, the twinkling of an eye, the monsters' numbers are diminishing. Furthermore, even when a knight occasionally gets injured from a monster's attack, they make an instant recovery within seconds. I knew this from before the start of the battle, but we have an overwhelming superiority.

I take a quick look, and the succubus is gazing out over the battlefield with a dumbfounded face. The monsters' corpses are piling up, but not a single knight corpse has appeared.

...The succubus didn't know about my existence. That was the biggest reason for her defeat.

I hold the cane aloft. And once again, on the knights who are fighting below, I cast healing magic.

Chapter 61: Succubus

"Why, whyy, whyyyyy!!"

I can hear the succubus' voice, screaming like a child. Spread out below her is a pile of monster corpses. There's not a single knight corpse among them. Ally casualties: 0.

Well, naturally. Our side has the overwhelming advantage in both numbers and quality. And I've been incessantly firing off healing magic boosted by the cane. Once I got used to the cane, literally without stopping. Knights whose bodies are continuously being healed, and a horde of monsters they can cut in half with a single stroke. Rather than a war, calling this a bulldozing or a massacre would be closer.

Our victory is already decided. I'd say about all that's left is to put an end to the few remaining small fry. My healing magic doesn't even seem necessary anymore.

"Amazing, amaaaaziing! Master, you're amazing!"

When I lower the cane for the moment, Yuel latches onto me and praises my actions. Was she moved by seeing her master's full power? Her eyes are totally sparkling.

When I saw the combination of my healing magic and the elite knights, I myself experienced just how overwhelming it is. It really is amazing. So amazing that, if we had shut our eyes to a few losses and accidental deaths, we might have been able to repel that swarm of thousands of monsters with this city's knight brigade alone.

"T-That cane...! Y-Y-You, is it youuuUUU!?"

As I'm contemplating, the succubus suddenly cries out. Screaming as she looks this way, she flies in a straight line towards me. Looks like she's finally aware of my existence.

Immediately, magic flies out from the nearby knights to intercept her. However, the succubus nimbly weaves through it as she approaches.

"So that's what it was! Shit, shit, shitshitshitshiiit! Again!? Summoned again!?"

Again? Summoned? What's she talking about?

...No, now that I think about it, this splendid cane. And this situation fighting against the succubus' troops. As I thought, there's something familiar about them.

But this is bad. This isn't the time to be thinking about it. The succubus is steadily getting closer as she slips past the magic. There are less than 20 meters between us now. What exactly does she intend to do once she gets close to me...?

"E-Eeek!"

However, the succubus shrieks and takes some distance again. On the panicking succubus' cheek, the thin red line of a wound appears. And, gently fluttering in the air, some strands of her hair.



The cause quickly becomes obvious.

"..."

Yuel, silently glaring at the succubus.

...Yuel's throwing knife has cut off a tuft of the succubus' hair. The succubus tries to approach a second time, but Yuel meets that with a barrage of knives, swishing through the air.

When I take a quick look at Yuel's eyes... whoa, dangerous. They're sharper than I've ever seen them before. Some serious killing intent. I can feel her firm resolution to absolutely never let anything get near me that would cause me harm.

Hold on, how many knives does Yuel have in her item box? She's already thrown at least 20 or 30 of them with incredible force, though.

"G-Gunununu..."

The succubus glares back at Yuel in vexation. I guess she won't get any closer than this after all. She's tried to approach me countless times while evading the spells, but each time Yuel has thwarted her with a knife barrage.

However, the succubus shows no sign of giving up. Over and over, she's repeatedly approaching and retreating.

...And it seems like the succubus has no combat ability, since she can't inflict damage on me either.

Wait, does she have a way to inflict damage? Wings. The succubus has those large wings. If she gets close, she could use her momentum to grab me and withdraw in one motion. Then all she'd have to do is drop me onto the ground from up high. Maybe that's what she's aiming for.

"Shit, shiiit... just you, until you're dead, I'm not leaaaviiinnnggg!"

The succubus tries to get close to me again while screaming, but in the end, stymied by the magic and the barrage of knives, she can't get any closer.

—In the middle of all that, one of Yuel's throwing knives grazes the succubus again.

While the succubus is twisting her body to evade it by a hair's breadth, the knife passes over her chest. And cuts it. What does it cut, you ask? The black bikini top that's clinging to her chest. The string portion right in the middle of it is cut clean in two.

The succubus' outward appearance is slightly older than Yuel. I'm not particularly interested in such a shabby body. But, should I call it male instinct? When something that's ordinarily hidden suddenly looks like it might peek out, even if you're not interested, your eyes will follow it.

...Ah, it really does seem like they're gonna be exposed.

While I'm gazing at the spectacle, my eyes meet the succubus' as she takes her distance again.

She looks back at my face with a dubious expression for some reason. Then down at her chest that looks all-too-ready to be emancipated, then back at my face once again.

We lock eyes for 2 or 3 seconds.

"...Wait, don't tell me... but..."

Flapping her torn black bikini with her fingers, the succubus continues gazing into my face. What could she be up to? If she does that they really will be exposed, though.

After that, she strokes the string part of her bikini with her fingers. I wonder if it's not just an ordinary article of clothing? Just by doing that, the bikini returns to the condition it was in before it got cut.

"It should be useless, but I suppose it's worth a shot..."

Then, muttering that, the succubus looks into my eyes. With those red pupils of hers. As they turn a glimmering crimson color, she stares at me.

"That is... y-you mustn't!"

At the same time the saint cries out.

—With a thump, my heart leaps in my chest.

"H-How's that...?"

The succubus makes an insecure face and looks at me. Her voice is weak, as if she's clinging to a minuscule hope.

"H-Huh...?"

...I didn't really care thus far, but now that I get a good look, this succubus, she's pretty cute. As you'd expect for a succubus, her face is quite well-ordered, and each of her actions has a seductiveness to it beyond her outward appearance. And besides, she may have no tits, but her body is curvaceous, especially around the hips. If I had to say whether she suits my tastes or not, in the end she's got no tits so it'd have to be a no, but for some reason there's some attractiveness there.

My head... is going blank.

Unconsciously, I take a step towards the succubus. Seeing my reaction, the succubus cackles in delight.

"Fu, kufufufu, fuhah... fuhahahahaha! Good boy. Now, come, this way!"

Then, maintaining a steady distance, the succubus lowers her altitude. She stops moving at a location away from the ramparts, at a distance where magic can't quite reach.

I wonder why. That succubus, despite her childlike figure, is starting to look like a very charming woman. I'm by no means a lolicon. But that body, it makes me want to vent all my boiling lust onto her. I don't know why, but I'm starting to feel that way. By the time I notice, I've taken another step in the succubus' direction.

"M-Masterrr!"

"Shiki-sama, you mustn't let her manipulate you! Please, strengthen your reason! If a dragon can do it, then Shiki-sama should certainly be able to cast her aside!"

The succubus' pupils turn red again. Her pupils are fascinating. Looking at these eyes, it feels like my head is boiling. My mind goes blank and stops working. But it's not a bad feeling at all.

"Hey, come over here.

...If you come right now, I'll do anything you want, you know?"

I can hear an extremely sweet voice, as if honey is flowing directly into my ears.

The parapet wall is right in front of me. If I climb over this, the succubus will do whatever I want for me...?

That vivid pink hair. Those small, soft-looking lips. Even if the tits are weak, that body with its womanly curves. It's looking very, very fascinating.

I want her to do whatever I ask. Let's go. Let's go right away.

"Sh-Shiki-sama!? Y-You must be joking...!?"

The saint is saying something, but who cares about that. I place my hand on the parapet.

"H-How can this be, even though a mere dragon was able to brush it aside...!?"

I get the feeling she just said my reasoning is lower than a dragon's. But my mind isn't working. My eyes won't leave the succubus' body. There's nothing left in my head anymore but the thoughts of what I'm going to do to that body from now on.

"This way, over here. Here boy, come this way."



Wiggling her black bikini with both hands like a stripper, the succubus invites

me. I can almost see them. Just a little more and I'll be able to see them. I can't quite see them yet. My eyes won't look away. I want to get closer. I put strength into my arms on the parapet.

"Masterrr! Master, please wait!"

My clothes are being tugged from behind, but my eyes won't leave the succubus' body. She's currently shaking her hips left and right emphatically, with her fingers hanging from her bikini bottom. She's repeatedly slipping it down slightly and returning it back to its original position, sending me a meaningful gaze. She keeps stopping right before; this situation is like a stripshow.

This isn't the time to worry about what's behind me. I want that succubus to do whatever I ask. I can't think about anything else anymore.

"B-But, the succubus' ability simply enhances desires, so it should not apply to humans, who have reason... N-No, but in actuality... b-by some chance, does Shiki-sama have the same level of reason as a low-grade monster...?"

I hear the confused voice of the saint. I get the feeling I'm being treated like a complete idiot. Then, the saint immediately raises her voice.

"Kuh, it cannot be helped! Hold Shiki-sama dow-"

—The instant the saint gives the nearby knights some sort of order.

"You be quiet!"

The succubus looks at the saint with those red pupils.

"Mmh...~~!"

The saint trembles with a jolt for an instant. But, with her strong will behind her eyes, she quickly goes back to glaring at the succubus. Then, with a flushed face and covering her own mouth with her hand, she instructs the knights to hold me down using hand signals.

The knights rush over to me.

...This is bad. I can't let the knights catch me here. I need to have the succubus do various things to me. To escape from the approaching knights, I kick off the ground.

—That instant.

"S-Shiki! I-I will, I will do whatever you want! So come to me!"

From behind, I hear that voice. I didn't mishear it, that's... Eris' voice.

"Wha!?"

The succubus exclaims in surprise.

My mind is somewhat blurry. I can't really understand what's going on.

...But, the succubus and Eris both said that they'll give me whatever I want.

The succubus is in front of me. Eris is behind.

I can only go in one direction.

I look at Eris behind me. So sexy. She's extremely fascinating. And they're huge.

I look at the succubus in front of me. So sexy. She's extremely fascinating. But they're small.

One more time, I look at Eris behind me.

...Incredibly huge.

"...Eris is better."

I stop climbing the parapet, and face back towards Eris.

"W-Whaaa!? C-C'mon, look this way! You can see it? Just a bit more and you'll be able to see it!? H-Hey, c'mon!"

I hear the succubus' shocked voice, but Eris said she'll do whatever I want.

That

Eris did. The succubus may be charming, but she can't win against the sensual shape of Eris' body. This way is better. Eris. Eris' giant tits are better. My thoughts are all being dyed in the color of Eris.

"I-Impossible! That's impossible!? E-Even with this much exposure!? E-Even though I'm the succubus!?"

When I head towards Eris in that manner, I hear the succubus' disbelieving voice coming from behind me. It's a miserable voice, on the verge of tears. Was

she that surprised that I went towards Eris?

"Oi, she beat the succubus at seducing a man..."

"W-Whoa."

I can hear the comments of the young male knights nearby. Eris' face turns red in a flash. But that has nothing to do with me. Inside my head, the delusions of what I'm going to do with Eris are expanding further and further. Just like that, I stagger up to Eris.

And, I embrace her.

"S-Shiki!? T-This, d-d-d-don't tell me it's...!?"

Perhaps because there was an unexpected sensation when she was embraced, Eris looks down and panics. I can't help it. I mean, my sexual desires are being controlled by the succubus.

That

being what it is, it's in quite a severe state at this point.

"G-Gu, guguguguuu! It's because my resurrection is incomplete! If it was complete, something like this would never...!"



The succubus' miserable voice groans in vexation. She sounds like she's

actually going to cry.

Something starts to bother me a little so I glance back, and below the ramparts I notice the few remaining monsters disperse and flee. As well as the teary-eyed succubus, staring at me. Her pupils have turned an even more vivid red color.

"...The monsters are running away? ...! S-She cannot possibly... is she concentrating her full power on Shiki-sama...!?"

...Huh? Somehow, the succubus is starting to look very charming after all. Even though she has no chest, I really wanna touch that chest.

"This way, come here! That's it, I won't kill you, I'll make you my servant! If you become my servant, all of the beautiful women in the world will be yours! That woman included!"

I hear the succubus' sweet voice. She'll give all of the women to me, Eris included?

...I like the sound of that.

"S-Servant!? T-That is no good! T-That is the one thing you must not do, Shiki-sama!!"

The saint says in a rough voice, her face flushing even further.

But if I go over to the succubus now, she'll give me everything. Most likely I can have not just Eris, but other big-breasted babes as well. My delusions are swelling. My body tries to twist toward the succubus.

"No matter what... I won't let go."

...However, Eris is hugging me and won't let go. She squeezes me even harder.

"Ah, wai, wait, Shiki... i-it's hitting, it's hitting me...!"

As I struggle to turn, something seems to be bothering Eris and her face steadily blushes even deeper. However, even so, she keeps her arms around me and doesn't let go.

But it's useless. Eris shouldn't be able to stop me with her power. I could

shake free like this.

"Have the knights hold him d... wait, what if by some slim possibility the succubus does take Shiki-sama away and actually make him her servant...? If they were to join hands... the world, the world would be..."

As for the saint, it looks like the succubus trying to recruit me was completely outside her calculations. The saint is in a panic, grumbling something in a low voice. Maybe she's the type who's weak at dealing with unexpected contingencies.

"Kuh... Eris-san, was it? You are in a serious relationship with Shiki-sama, I presume. I have heard that once a gentleman is comforted, his desires will abate for some time.

...That is to say, we shall hold off the succubus' advance, so during that time... can we depend on you? T-This is most likely the optimal approach."

Then, I hear the saint call out to Eris.

"O-Once he's comforted!?"

Still hugging me, Eris asks back with a bright red face. Her expression is stained with shame. No matter how many times I see that I never get tired of looking at it.

However, when Eris realizes I'm looking at her face, she hastily grabs the back of my head and clutches it against her. She definitely just wedged my head between those giant tits. I can't see her embarrassed face.

...But, I wonder why. I feel like I'm in total bliss right now.

"B-But we're not even married yet!"

I can only hear Eris' bashful voice. Then, trying to drown out her voice,

"Hey, come here. Come with me, and let's make a monster army one more time. Join hands with me, and we could even conquer the world, you know? Gather all the beauties in the world, and create the greatest harem ever, all for

you. That's right, if you resurrect Evil God-sama, he will grant you eternal youth as his apostle. Come with me, and you can indulge in women for all eternity, never wasting away, you know?"

another extremely sweet voice echoes in my ears. I bet that would be quite a wonderful world. A harem just for me with all the world's beautiful women, what a lovely sound.

That's it, my head isn't working well right now for some reason, but I feel like I'm a man who can make calm judgments. I'll just get my fill of Eris' breasts a bit longer, then head over to the succubus.

...Wait, can't I just bring Eris with me over to the succubus like this? That's more logical. I pull Eris' restraining hands away to try and extract my head from her chest.

"I-If, if Shiki-sama falls into the enemy's hands here, there will be no opportunity to get married! If the succubus and Shiki-sama join hands, a horde of immortal monsters will be born! Mankind, mankind will perish!"

I can hear the saint's panicked voice. I don't feel any of her usual composure. Her voice is cracking and absurdly flustered.

But it's fine. The saint has no tits either, but she's a beauty and all so she can still join my harem. She has nothing to worry about.

"T-That's true, it can't be helped... if it can't be helped, it can't be helped, right."

Then, when I somehow manage to raise my face from Eris' chest, our eyes meet as she looks at me with resolution in her face.

—The next instant, there's a soft sensation on my lips. Right in front of me is Eris' face, with her eyes closed.

She's kissing me.



Not on the cheek, like with Ruruka. On the lips. The sensation of her soft lips.

A sweet smell dances in my nostrils. Eris' long hair tickles the base of my neck. Since we're stuck together, her breasts are squished against me. My mind is being completely filled with information about Eris.

Everything about the succubus gradually disappears from my head.

"H-How was... that?"

Still glued to me, Eris asks, not meeting my eyes. Her face is flushed, and her eyes are slightly moist. As if she's feeling conscious of her own lips, she's covering her mouth with one hand, continuing to clutch me against her with her other hand.

...

My simmering head boils even harder. My mind gets even more fuzzy. I wanna push her down right here, right now. But the words "kicked out again" flicker through a corner of my mind. Instantly, my body stops moving.

"W-Was that not enough...?"

"O-Of course it's not enough! Look, what I'm telling you is to please put those huge breasts of yours to use and make Shiki-sama spurt out his semen once!"

The saint is saying something decidedly sinful[1], but her eyes are serious. By some chance, the succubus might have gotten to her mind too.

"S-Spurt out his semen!?"

"S-Saint-sama!?"

Perhaps never expecting those words to come out of the saint's mouth, the nearby guards and knights are startled. I wonder if her pure image as a symbolic figure of the church is going to be okay? Rather, why did she mention Eris' breasts? What is she trying to make Eris do? I wanted to go join under the succubus, but after something like that was said I can't leave this place.

"B-But... i-in a place like this..."

Eris looks around. In front of her gaze, there are numerous male knights. She knits her eyebrows in agony and clenches her eyes tight.

"Come, quickly cast that woman aside! You are a magnificent man of talent!"

As my underling, you'll be given a life where you'll never want for women! That's right, a man of your caliber cannot be satisfied by a single woman. Come over here, and I'll prepare you the greatest harem ever to suit your exact tastes!"

The voice of the succubus, calling out to me. However, as if reacting to that voice, Eris looks at me. She's simply looking into my eyes. A short time passes. Eris' expression suddenly becomes tender. Then, as if rethinking something, she closes her eyes for a moment.

When she opens her eyes again, Eris makes a determined face.

"I hate this embarrassment, but I would hate losing you even more..."

The next instant, Eris places her hands on the buttons of her outfit.

At the same time, my belt is unfastened. The belt buckle makes a clinking noise as I feel it being pulled. Eris is unfastening her buttons one by one with both hands while she removes my belt.

...H-Huh?

My head isn't working that well, but even I notice something strange about that. I look at Eris. As she finishes undoing half of the buttons on her outfit, I can already see the color of her skin in the center of her chest. But both of her hands are entirely committed to unfastening her buttons. They aren't going towards my pants. Even though she's taking off her clothes with both hands, somehow she's removing my belt...?

I look down. My reason returns all at once.

Just like that moment when you're in the middle of appreciating a porno and someone suddenly enters the room, my erotic feelings are instantly blown away. I rapidly come to my senses.

It's Yuel. Yuel is there.

My pants are covering the lower half of my body, which has become quite severe. Yuel takes a long, hard look at that from point-blank range. Then, continuing to stare at it intensely... she tries to slip my pants down.

"I-I'll help too!"

I feel Yuel's slender hands pull forcefully downwards.

The succubus is currently manipulating my sexual desires. If my sexual desires are manipulated,
that is going to happen.

...I gotta say, this is the most unbelievable situation I've ever been in.

In a few seconds, when Yuel pulls down my pants. Right in front of her eyes, what will be exposed? In public view, just what kind of tragedy will occur? And what is Yuel planning to do after that?

The prediction forms instantaneously.

Reflexively, I support my pants with my hands. Yuel tries to pull down my pants along with my underwear at almost the exact same time.

...I made it in time.

"Sh-Shiki?"

"I-I'm okay! There's no way I'd lose to the succubus! It took a little time, but I managed to throw it off by myself! I'm fine already, Yuel, so get your hands off my pants!"

"Master, y-you may end up being manipulated again! T-To the end, I-I'll help you properly to the end!"

However, Yuel doesn't remove her hands from my pants. She's still trying to yank them down.

"Y-Yuel! I-I'm fine already, I'm good, so take your hands off my pants! Believe in your master!"

When I emphasize it that strongly, a despondent Yuel finally removes her hands from my pants.

...T-That was dangerous. If the succubus had controlled not just my desires but Yuel's as well, I might have been defeated, in a certain sense. Rather, even though there are so many knights on guard nearby, what the hell was I doing? I was on the verge of having an important part of me on open public display.

The succubus is way too frightening.

"Kh, kuuuh... it was just a little further... but not yet, I'm not giving up yet!"

The succubus starts to stare at me again with her red pupils. While resuming her stripshow too. Perhaps because she's floating in the air, she can pose freely as well. She turns her legs towards me and spreads them, then with careful timing where as soon as I think it's going to peek out, she makes a dynamic half-turn and hides it again. I can't tear my eyes away.

Oh crap. At this rate, I really will end up being helped by Yuel in public. That would be the end of my dignity as a person.

However, at the same time.

"—!"

"Pugiii!"

I hear a roar I've heard before. And suddenly, from up above, a dragon comes swooping down. With ferocious speed, the dragon strikes the succubus with its tail as she's making an M shape in the air. From the force of the impact, the succubus slams into the ground.

That's.... Ruruka's Earth Dragon. Looks like Ruruka has finally returned from her trip to the royal capital to request reinforcements.

"...Ow... sniff... I-It's all grainyyy..."

However, although the succubus gets covered in dirt, she escapes to the sky again in a wobbly orbit.

Facing the succubus, the dragon emits its breath. The petrifying breath grazes her.

"Higiii, piiii—!"

As the breath sweeps over the tip of her foot, the succubus begins to flee from the dragon at full speed. Making a shriek like none I've ever heard before.

The dragon follows her like that. She desperately escapes whenever the dragon is about to strike or bite her. Ah, the breath hit her foot again. I borrow the telescope from the saint again to confirm it, and one of her legs is petrified up to the ankle. She's seriously bawling. Sobbing as she flees.

"Send out a pursuit unit immediately! With the nearby monsters eliminated, now is our chance! Follow the succubus to the ends of the earth if you must, and cut off her head!"

The saint hurls instructions at the knights.

"Shiki-sama... please take a moment of respite, if you would."

After that, the saint says that to me and smiles weakly. Her smile is a bit stiff. Well, she must not have expected that I would be susceptible to manipulation by the succubus. And I'm pretty sure she said that my reasoning ability was the same as a low-grade monster's.

...The succubus may be my natural enemy. Even though having reason and intellect should prevent a being from being controlled by their desires, it had an instant effect on me. Even though when the saint had those red eyes staring at her, she was able to instruct the knights in no time at all.

...I wonder if my reason really is on the level of a low-grade monster's? I'm losing a little of my self-confidence.

"But..."

If I had kept being manipulated like that, what would have happened to me? I peer down below the ramparts.

...Falling would mean instant death from this height. At that rate, I would have climbed over the parapet willingly and plummeted onto the ground. I shiver a little.

Assuming I didn't fall, and I went along with the succubus on a world conquest, building a world-class harem?

...I think that wouldn't be so bad in its own way, so I'd probably end up being easily manipulated.

I glance a little higher. Looking at the plains beyond the city, I notice that a group of knights have formed a pursuit unit and are galloping on horseback in

the succubus' direction.

The number of monsters in the vicinity should be greatly diminished after that battle. As long as the succubus doesn't have monsters to manipulate, she's just a weakling. And in terms of flying speed, the dragon looks faster. If the knights and the dragon cooperate, they should be able to finish her off before too long.

Moreover, the succubus' leg has been petrified slightly. Even if she does get away, it's only a matter of time before her whole body completely turns to stone.

There was a bit of an accident, but we won. The knight brigades didn't take any losses, either. Minus the part where I got manipulated a tiny bit, you could call this a perfect victory.

"The succubus is running away! Victory is ours! Let me hear your cries of triumph!"

The nearby Fran makes an exalted expression as she shouts.

...So this girl was here? She was probably firing off interception magic from behind, but I totally didn't notice her.

Man, she sure is a lord's daughter. In response to her voice, the knights raise their own. Propagating one after another, they merge into a single voice. The massive cheer from the knights rises up to me.

Footnotes:

1. Similar to the Bible pun earlier: 聖女 (holy woman) → 性女 (sex woman). seijo seijo

Chapter 62: Cane

It's been a few minutes since the succubus got away. After the saint finishes giving instructions to the knights, she calls out to me.

"Shiki-sama, today was a magnificent success. Though I knew of it in advance, for you to be able to use such healing magic continuously... as a fellow user of healing magic, I was once again astonished."

With a smile, the saint offers me praise. I guess in the end, there's a difference between knowing something and seeing it firsthand.

...Well, she was absolutely more astonished when I was manipulated by the succubus, though. The way she was all freaking out back then was amazing. And her smile was pretty stiff earlier, too.

But at this point, I don't sense any stiffness in her smile. While she was giving orders to the knights, it looks like she was somehow able to digest her surprise over the fact that I was manipulated by the succubus.

"We confirmed it some time ago, but it would seem there was not a single casualty this time. Fighting against that many monsters, with no losses. This could surely be called a miraculous outcome."

"I see. Well, that's a relief."

It seemed that way when I was watching from above, but there really were no deaths among the knights after all? Well, they were only low-grade monsters and all. And I was constantly invoking healing magic, so as long as we didn't have terrible luck, it wasn't a battle where anyone would die that quickly.

"This result as well was all thanks to your actions, Shiki-sama. I must express my sincerest gratitude."

"Master, you're amazing!"

The saint and Yuel praise my achievements without restraint. But that's just it. I can accept that Yuel's praise is genuine, but I'm starting to feel like there's another side to all this flattery from the saint. Rather, as the saint was expressing her "sincerest gratitude", she grasped both of my hands and smiled

sweetly. If only the saint's breasts were more average, I might have fallen just from that smile, that's how charming it was. Everything is too perfect, which conversely makes it somehow suspicious. And there's the matter of the shills as well.

"Well, it's because the knights worked so hard."

For the time being, I'll continue the conversation while maintaining a moderate sense of distance.

"...Which reminds me, Shiki-sama, we have not yet discussed your reward. As for the knights and we members of the church, it could be said that protecting the cities is our professional duty, but Shiki-sama granted us the favor of participating out of kindness alone. Naturally, a reward is due. It follows that it would take place in a formal location at a later date, but... Shiki-sama, what type of reward do you wish for?"

Wrapping her hands around mine, the saint asks me that. Now that she mentions it, is everyone here but me connected to the lord, the knight brigade, or the church? There are no adventurer-looking civilians, either. Ruruka is the one exception, but knowing her, she's probably having them give her separate compensation.

But man, a wish, huh?

"...If you ask me so suddenly, I can't think of anything right away."

Since this is so abrupt, nothing in particular comes to mind. No, one thing does, but I probably can't say that I want to create a harem with all of the beautiful women in the world.

"If there is nothing in particular, then how would you feel about the position of archbishop in the Church of Medine? It so happens that a seat has recently opened up. If it's Shiki-sama, you would doubtless receive approval from the church. The position is based in the church right here in Merhatz, so I wonder if the circumstances would not be convenient for you in one way or another."

"A-Archbishop!?"

Upon the saint's words, Eris yelps out in surprise from nearby.

...Her expression has me interested; there's the sense to it that her sexual desires that were stirred up by the succubus are still smoldering a little. If I end up watching Eris now, I wouldn't put it past myself to remember various things and have an accidental situation occur. My memories from when I was being manipulated by the succubus remain clear and distinct, after all. I try to remove Eris from my consciousness as best I can and chew on the saint's words.

"...Archbishop, huh."

I know that it's a highly eminent position within the church. But, other than the fact that it's distinguished, I don't really know much about it. Even if I'm offered the position all of a sudden, it doesn't feel real to me.

What's up with that? For now, I'll consider the benefits I currently know about. First, since my healing magic ability is already revealed, I get the feeling that having an official position in an organization somewhere would be prudent for the sake of self-preservation. In exchange for letting them make moderate use of my healing magic, I can be protected from those who would target me. Such a relationship may become necessary for my continued survival.

Even if I take the position of archbishop, I'd just be filling a hole that opened up, not kicking down an existing archbishop. And the followers of the previous archbishop were arrested across the board, so I wouldn't be making unnecessary waves either.

Also... if I'm distinguished, girls will approach me. That's the greatest benefit.

"...Or else, Shiki-sama, rather than a position, would you prefer a woman?"

As I'm envisioning it, the saint suggests exactly what was on my mind. I wonder how she reached that conclusion? Was it showing on my face? ...Wait, since I was manipulated by the succubus, does she think of me as someone who's loose with women? That's exactly right, though.

"In that case... this may be audacious, but how about me? If choosing by lineage alone, I believe that I would be most suitable for Shiki-sama.

...Moreover, as the succubus' death is not yet confirmed, it would be preferable to have as many women around Shiki-sama as possible. So even if it means sharing you with Eris-sama, I have no objection."

Then the saint continues speaking. Clutching my hands, she watches my face with her unchanging smile. What's this all about? I wasn't expecting her to try and market herself like this. Not to mention the harem approval. It doesn't appear to be something like "watching you fight the succubus was so moving", either. If anything, it'd be more natural for her to despise me for the way I got toyed with during the latter half. This totally reeks of politics.

"W-Wait a minute! That's, I-I... I, I'm..."

When Eris catches the saint's words she tries to say something, but she can't get it out.

Judging from my experience so far, she was probably about to say something like "Shiki and I aren't in that kind of relationship" by reflex, but then she was at a loss over whether to say it, that kind of mood. Does that mean she's not going to deny it? I wonder if that's what it means?

I'm extremely interested, but since earlier there's been a tugging sensation on my clothes from below that's telling me I need to put off this topic for now. Besides, if all of a sudden I'm offered someone with the status of a saint of all things, there's no way I can reply right away.

"H-Hold on a minute. I'll be troubled if you say something like that so suddenly! Besides, aren't you someone with the status of a saint? No matter how..."

The moment I try to say I'm not suited for her.

"You think there is a disparity? That is not so, Shiki-sama."

As if she was anticipating my thoughts, the saint responds to them. Then, her gaze turns toward the cane I'm holding.

The cane? ...Oh right. I didn't have time to think about it while we were fighting the succubus, but when they saw this cane, Yuel and Eris, and even the succubus herself, were surprised.

—Suddenly, a certain line plays back in my head. It's what the succubus said when she was trying to approach me, after she saw this cane.

“Again!? Summoned again!?”

Certainly, the succubus did say that. What did she mean by it? By some chance, does the fact that the saint is trying to offer herself to me have some connection to that...?

Besides, back when the saint handed over that cane. Yuel and Eris both made a surprised expression when they were watching me wield it. As if they had realized something; that's the kind of face they were making.

How exactly did I look from the perspective of Yuel and Eris? Let me try looking at myself objectively.

In opposition to the forces of the succubus, a man holding a splendid cane.

“Oi, you can't be serious...”

That's it. I remember. I've seen that figure before.

Back when I was teaching Yuel healing magic, and tried reading the Bible. That scene from chapter three.

This is... completely the same as that illustration depicted in the Bible.

In the illustration, the man who was confronting the succubus was holding a splendid cane. The one that I currently have in my hands... no doubt about it. It's that cane, the very same one.

...Besides, since the illustration was in black and white I didn't pay it any heed, but now that I think about it, the man's hair in that illustration... it was black. Pure black, completely filled in. Jet black hair, just like mine and the saint's.

—I feel like I've figured it out.

The words “summoned again” that the succubus uttered. Their meaning.

I should have died in Japan. But before I realized it, I was here in this other world. I had no idea why. And I didn't think there was any way of knowing.

Thus far, I didn't know the reason why I was here in this world.

...If these thoughts are correct, they would explain it.

"Rather, there may be no woman in this world who is a match for you, Shiki-sama. Your ability with healing magic alone defies reason.

...Shiki-sama, have you perchance had the opportunity to read the Bible?"

The saint opens her mouth with that smile still intact.

The Bible. This cane that's the same one from the illustration. The word 'summoned'. And the black-haired man confronting the succubus in that illustration. Even without asking, I can pretty much already tell where she's going.

"When the evil god poses a threat to the world, the Goddess Medine sends her apostle from the otherworld... that's right, that was in a passage like that in the first chapter of the Bible."

Eris murmurs to herself.

...Maybe I should have read a bit more of the Bible myself. The reason that I came to this world has always been written in a book I've held in my hands countless times already.

"From the moment I came to this city, I have always been searching for you. While a sealing jewel was being stolen from the church and the menace of the evil god was about to threaten the world once again, in this city, you performed what could only be called a miracle by the power of god."

The saint strengthens her grip on my hands. There's a tangible fervor in her voice and in her palms. Then, just like that, the saint kneels on the ground and gazes up at me.

"Hailing from a distant world and granted the blessing of the Goddess Medine as the symbol of the power of god, our savior..."

And in a clear, unmistakable voice:

"Sage-sama."

Volume 4 LN Side Story: Fran's Recommendation

A day has passed since the succubus countermeasure meeting. As I'm petting Yuel's head while she sits on my lap in the guest room provided to us by the lord, the door suddenly opens.

"I heard it. You, your mana was actually perfectly fine."

The second I notice that Fran has entered the room, she abruptly asserts that.

I sense a hint of anger in her voice. Her expression is also giving off a sullen, offended feeling.

"A-Apologies for disturbing you so suddenly."

I take a look, and Sera is with her as well. She enters the room chasing after Fran, and immediately bows her head to me.

"Because you did not tell the truth when I taught you about magic, I consequently misdiagnosed it as mana leakage disease, no? ...Why did you not say anything!"

Fran glances at Yuel, but immediately returns her gaze to me, raising her voice at a constant rate.

"Ahh, that..."

...Oh yeah, Fran did teach me a little about attack magic before.

If I recall correctly, back then, she concluded from the large quantity of mana I was giving off that I didn't have enough left to use attack magic.

Since I could potentially fix it with training, Fran also gave me a magic tool for measuring the mana concentration around myself at that time.

I stayed silent since I didn't really want to reveal my true ability, but I'm pretty sure that for her part, Fran was feeling fairly sympathetic for me.

...Well yeah, no wonder she's mad.

But it's not like I hid it from her just for the heck of it. There was a good reason for that.

"My bad. But it's not like I kept silent about it for no reason. I wanted to keep my ability hidden as much as I could unless absolutely necessary."

"There was no need for that. What was the problem with letting me know!"

Fran brings her angry face increasingly closer. Looks like she finds it hard to stomach.

This distance is close.

Her face is close.

...This is dangerous, huh.

When this bitch gets angry the fists really come out.

No, rather than her fists, it's magic that comes out.

Furthermore, since she has some halfway-decent ability, she can cast chantless (albeit unstable) magic.

She can't very well shoot magic at me in this situation with Yuel on my lap, but it pretty much feels like she could lunge at me at any moment. My legs tense up.

Then, when I open my mouth to try and explain,

"Fran, I heard that Shiki-san's EX Heal was what got him wrapped up in the recent plot by the archbishop... you also saw the shape he was in at that time, did you not?"

Sera preempts me with that.

"T-That was..."

Fran is at a loss for words.

Well, until I was able to borrow the baths at the lord's mansion, I was completely covered in blood.

Thinking back on it, when we arrived at the lord's mansion, I seem to recall Fran looking at my appearance in shock.

Most likely, Fran remembers that too.

"...B-But, I heard it from Father. That miracle from god during the time with

the Krankheit Turtle. That was your work as well, was it not? To do such a thing when you are loath to stand out, is that not a contradiction!"

Nevertheless, Fran still won't back down.

Most likely, she doesn't know where she should vent her anger anymore.

...Maybe it's because she was trying to teach me magic so earnestly.

But I can't answer that question honestly. Yuel's just quietly sitting on my lap getting her head petted, but she's here.

"T-That was, you see... um, right... it was for the sake of the citizens."

That's what I told Yuel, but I was honestly just doing it to distract Yuel and comfort her when it seemed like she was going to break down in tears.

In front of Yuel, who's still depressed about "I couldn't protect you", I can't tell Fran that it was actually to comfort Yuel.

"...F-For the sake of the citizens? Y-You, you mean to say that it was for the sake of this very Merhatz...? You took on such a risk to rescue this city from a crisis...?"

However, Fran ends up being more shocked than I imagined.

...Oh right, Fran is the lord's daughter.

To put it another way, you could say she's the next lord.

I didn't mean it that way, but I might have come off a bit patronizing.

Fran, who is all up in my face at this point, stops and looks at it.

"T-Too close!"

Then she quickly takes her distance as her own face reddsens.

...Flipping out about "Too close!" when she's the one who approached me, it's totally irrational.

"...I am going back to my room."

After that, Fran turns her back to me in a somewhat despondent-looking mood.

And just like that, she leaves the room.

"Fufu, please excuse us, Shiki-san."

Sera also exits the room with a somewhat pleased face after bowing to me.

...Finally, they left.

All of the tension while Fran was here that she could lunge at me out of nowhere at any moment drains from my legs.

Maybe I'm being overly cautious, but that girl has previously committed the offense of shooting attack magic into her marriage interview partner's crotch. And it was only an attempt, but she did try to fire attack magic at me too.

...Although I more or less understand that Fran isn't a total bitch.

But she's the type where I never know when I'm going to step on a land mine and set her off.

Now that she's gone, I can finally relax.

"Fran, whatever is the matter? ...In a place like this."

"F-Father..."

However, I hear voices from outside the room. The lord's and Fran's.

Sounds like she ran into the lord on her way out of this room.

"Fran, by some chance, d-did you consider our talk...?"

"..."

"F-Fran!"

Instantly, I hear footsteps running away from the room.

The shunned lord's saddened voice rings out.

...Fran appears to be in her difficult years. I don't know what kind of talk they had, though.

...And yet I wonder what the lord came here to do?

This room is at the end of the hallway. He couldn't have just happened to pass by.

I wonder if he's going to hold another succubus countermeasure meeting?

As I'm pondering, there's a knock on the door.

"Pardon me for coming unannounced."

"...No problem."

The lord enters the room and sits down on the nearby chair.

His complexion isn't very good. Well, he's probably busy with the succubus countermeasures and whatnot.

"So... what sort of discussion did you have with Fran?"

The lord asks, leaning forward and looking at me eagerly.

That expression kinda looks like he's expecting something.

...It won't make me happy when a middle-aged guy is the one giving me that expression, though.

"It was about my healing magic ability."

I hesitate over how to answer, but I guess I don't really need to tell him the details.

Judging from the fact that he went out of his way to come to this room, the main topic is most likely something else.

Besides, I'm busy petting Yuel's head.

It's not like I can't spare a little time to talk to a middle-aged man, but only a little.

"...I see. Shiki-kun, no, Shiki-dono. What do you think of Fran?"

However, the lord brings up the subject of Fran again.

...That reminds me, this lord told me something to the tune of "please take care of Fran from now on as well" previously. By some chance, did the lord come to this room in order to...

Hunching down, I continue the conversation.

"What do I think?"

"Look, I may be saying this as her father, but I think that Fran has a lovely face. I hear that Shiki-dono is unmarried. If you hold any special sentiments for

Fran—"

"I don't."

"W-Wait, I am not asking you to make a decision immediately. Look, surely if you continue to live together, your feelings may cha—"

"I've got enough on my plate already."

When I reply immediately, the lord's face pales even further.

...This middle-aged lord is doing his best too, huh.

He must want to find a suitor for his daughter quite a lot if he's searching for a marriage partner for her at a time like this when he's busy dealing with the succubus.

I'm gradually starting to pity him, but seriously, I have enough on my plate.

Ruruka told me she loves me, and Eris' reaction when she came into the bath yesterday while I was washing off the blood had me intrigued.

Also I don't necessarily feel any urgency to get my hands on Fran. She's flat-chested and all.

"B-But you know, even Fran has many good sides to her. L-Look, she has nice facial features... a-also, yes, she's slender. Isn't she slender?"

...Don't just praise her outward appearance, Lord-san.

Most likely, he didn't expect such an immediate reply and now he's panicking.

However, the lord receives timely help from an unexpected place.

"Fran-san has taught me so much I never knew about history. Plus, she promised to teach me about offensive magic next time. Fran-san is... a nice person."

It's Yuel. Sitting on my lap, she mumbles that.

...Come to think of it, back when I was taking a bath, Fran was keeping Yuel company.

Besides, taking into account her attitude back when she was teaching me magic, she's a surprisingly caring person.

But her lack of chest and her extremely short temper end up spoiling everything else.

"Indeed, that is true! She is surprisingly caring, that girl. Fran tends to go around in circles, but her sense of responsibility when it comes to protecting this city is twice as strong as anyone else's. And while she may be a tad quick to fisticuffs on account of her impulsivity, she is truly a kind girl."

The lord starts trying to sell me on Fran's good points.

...Rather than quick to fisticuffs, she's quick to hurl Fireballs.

More importantly, Fran is quite the man-hater.

The lord can say whatever he wants, but for her part, Fran would never approve a marriage.

"You truly won't take her...? If Shiki-dono were her partner, I sincerely believe it would turn out well."

The lord mutters in an imploring voice.

...Fran's face isn't bad. Besides, her attack magic is excellent, and she has her position as the lord's daughter. I doubt he'd be completely unable to find a partner for her.

From the lord's perspective, he must see me with my nonstandard healing magic as a superior article to some degree.

But I wish he'd ask someone else.

"At this rate, finding a suitor will truly be... with that personality, once she exceeds a marriageable age... ohh, what will I do...?"

The lord seems to shrink a little as he hangs his head.

It's been ten-odd minutes since the lord said "Let us speak of this again" and left the room.

Once again, the door opens.

"My apologies for earlier."

Immediately I assume the lord has come back, but Fran and Sera are the ones who enter my room.

Fran charges into the room and stands in front of me.

Then, averting her gaze slightly, she begins to speak.

"You saved not only my life, but the lives of the citizens that I will one day govern... that is to say, I am not unwilling to make myself available to you."

Fran says, fidgeting a little.

But I don't quite understand what she means.

Not unwilling?

What could that mean?

...Wait, based on what the lord was saying earlier, "Don't tell me you're talking about marriage?"

"N-No! Where did you get that idea!"

Guess not.

Well, considering Fran's personality, there's no way.

But then what did she mean?

"I-I meant... if anything were to happen again, do not hesitate to rely on me, that is what I meant to say."

Looking down, Fran adds that.

"Oh my!"

Sera covers her mouth, letting out an awfully pleased voice.

"I-It is simply that as the lord's daughter, I feel obligated to repay the debt for saving the city, that is all! T-That truly is the only reason!"

As if reacting to Sera's voice, Fran starts to panic.

Somehow or other I understand.

...This is probably Fran trying her best to repay the favor out of obligation for my saving the city.

But she's wasting her effort.

Fran is too impulsive, and if I ask her for something I can only imagine it

turning sour.

But still, I'm not so twisted as to reject this wholehearted declaration from Fran.

"Well, I'll consider it."

When I answer like that, Fran puts her hand on her chest in relief.

She might have been anxious over whether or not I would accept. Although if she was that anxious about it, she may as well have just ignored the debt.

...I thought the same thing when she taught me magic, but she really is a conscientious person.

If only she didn't have a quick temper, there would be tons of suitors after this side of her.

As I'm contemplating, Sera suddenly approaches me.

"Please consider an engagement to Fran as well, alright?"

"Not happening."

Perhaps because it's the same thing the lord was talking about earlier, I end up answering reflexively in no time.

But I only realize after the fact.

...Fran is currently right in front of me.

Oh crap.

"~~~~!?"

No matter how I look at it, denying it in no time was unwise.

Even Fran is a woman, more or less.

No matter how little she thinks of me, she still has her pride.

Fran's face rapidly reddens.

This redness is undoubtedly not anything in the "shy" category.

...She's mad.

Just from seeing her complexion, I can tell that her anger is amping up.

"I, I-I, I should be the one saying that!!!"

Then, a red light forms on the side of Fran's face.

A chantless Fireball.

She slams it onto the stone floor.